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Unravelling the Determinants of Strategic Planning Effectiveness in Public Organizations:

A Strategic Decision-Making Perspective at the Individual and Organizational Level.

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To Camille & Anna – Thank you for showing me that anyone can change their stars.

The year is 2012. I was standing in the restaurant of the ING Headquarters in Brussels. Before me stood a plate with an amazingly juicy steak and fries that curled as if to say “please do eat me”. The steak bathed in a beautiful mushroom sauce. I did not eat one bite. For those of you who know me, that is only the second time in my life that I refused a steak. The first time being the result of an appendicitis. So what event triggered this unusual behavior on my part? I had just gotten off the phone with Prof. dr. Sebastian Desmidt, my future supervisor, who told me “you got the job”. My loss of appetite was the result of a combination of emotions, ranging from absolute enthusiasm and happiness to doubt and, perhaps, insecurity. What have I gotten myself into? Do I have what it takes to become a scientist, a management scholar? These doubts, however, were soon minimized by my excitement for what laid ahead. In line with the motto of my former boarding school “Ic poghe om 't hoghe” (I strive for greatness), I decided to run before I could walk, hit some walls, struggle, survive, win, lose, network and understand. I decided to obtain a PhD.

In retrospect, I have never doubted my decision. The past three and a half years have been the rollercoaster I expected. I was pushed to my limits, and went far beyond them. Awards were given, papers were accepted and rejected, I travelled throughout Europe and lived in Hong Kong. I put myself in uncomfortable positions in order to be comfortable everywhere. Ultimately, I lived my doctoral life to its fullest and sucked out all the marrow that lies within the PhD experience. However, I did not go at it alone and I want to use this section of my PhD manuscript to thank some who, both academically and emotionally, supported me throughout the entire experience. Without you this would not have been possible.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	I
Table of contents.....	V
List of tables	XIII
List of figures	XIV
Summary (in English).....	1
Summary (in Dutch)	5
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	9
1.1. Outline of research problem	9
1.2. Scope statement of doctoral manuscript.....	12
1.3. Conceptual overview of chapters.....	14
1.4. Methodological overview of chapters.....	19
1.5. Awards, publications and conference presentations.....	23
Awards.....	23
Publications	23
Conference presentations	25
1.6. References.....	26
Chapter 2: A state of research on strategic management in public organizations: A review of evidence ...	31
2.1. Introduction.....	32
2.2. Conceptualizing the nature of strategic management processes in public organizations.....	33
The determinants of public strategic management processes	34
The characteristics of public strategic management processes.....	36

The outcomes of public strategic management processes	38
2.3. Data collection process	39
2.4. Empirical evidence on the relationships between determinants, characteristics and outcomes of public strategic management processes	40
Exploring link 1, 2 and 3: The impact of contingency and institutional determinants on public strategic management	41
Exploring link 4, 5 and 6: The impact of practices-practitioners-praxis during plan formulation, implementation and evaluation	45
2.5. Conclusion and avenues for future research	49
A contingency perspective on public strategic management	49
New Institutional Theory and S-as-P as theoretical frameworks	50
2.6. References	51
Chapter 3: Strategic-decision quality in public organizations: An information-processing perspective	59
3.1. Introduction	60
3.2. Theory and hypotheses	63
Rational planning practices	64
Procedural justice	67
3.3. Methods	68
Units of analysis	68
Data	68
Common method bias	69
Dependent variable	71
Independent variables	72

Controls	74
Analysis.....	76
3.4. Statistical results	76
3.5. Discussion	77
3.6. Limitations.....	81
3.7. Conclusion	82
3.8. References.....	82
Chapter 4: Rational planning and politicians' preferences for spending and reform: replication and extension of a survey experiment.....	91
4.1. Introduction.....	92
4.2. Performance information and decision-making by politicians	95
4.3. Moderating influence of strategic goals.....	97
4.4. Methods	99
Replication strategy and units of analysis	99
Data collection.....	100
Independent variables.....	102
Dependent variables	103
Moderating variable	104
4.5. Analysis.....	105
Balance and manipulation checks	105
The replication: Performance information and preferences for spending and reform	107
Extension: The moderating impact of strategic goals	110
4.6. Discussion	113

4.7. Limitations.....	116
4.8. Conclusion	116
4.9. References.....	117
Chapter 5: Strategic planning in public organizations: A review of micro-activities and outcomes.....	121
5.1. Introduction.....	122
5.2. Theoretical framework.....	124
5.3. Methods	129
Data collection.....	130
Data analysis.....	134
5.4. Results	136
Micro-activities.....	140
Outcomes	141
Relations between micro-activities and outcomes	142
5.5. Discussion	148
Further research.....	151
5.6. Limitations.....	153
5.7. Conclusion	153
5.8. References.....	154
Chapter 6: Strategic-decision quality in public organizations: The importance of formal and participatory strategic planning	163
6.1. Introduction.....	164
6.2. Strategic planning formality and strategic-decision quality.....	165
6.3. Stakeholder participation and strategic-decision quality	166

6.4. Methods	167
Empirical setting.....	167
Data collection.....	168
Measurement of variables	168
Exploratory factor analysis	169
6.5. Data analysis and results.....	172
Measurement model, descriptive statistics and correlations.....	173
Structural model.....	176
6.6. Discussion.....	177
6.7. Limitations.....	179
6.8. Conclusion	179
6.9. References.....	180
Chapter 7: Cognitive styles, user acceptance and commitment to strategic plans in public organizations: An empirical analysis	185
7.1. Introduction.....	186
7.2. Theory and hypotheses	188
Cognitive styles and user acceptance	189
User acceptance and commitment to strategic plan	192
7.3. Methods	193
Empirical setting.....	193
Units of analysis.....	193
Data collection.....	194
Measures.....	195

Common method bias	196
7.4. Data analysis and results	197
Univariate and bivariate analysis	197
Multivariate analysis	199
7.5. Discussion	203
7.6. Limitations	207
7.7. Conclusion	207
7.8. References.....	208
Chapter 8: Conclusion	215
8.1. Theoretical implications	215
Macro level (chapters two, three and four)	217
Micro level (chapters five, six and seven)	219
Overarching theoretical implications	221
8.2. Practical implications.....	225
Macro level (chapters two, three and four)	225
Micro level (chapters five, six and seven)	228
8.3. Limitations and future research	231
Limitations of the literature reviews (chapters 2 and 5).....	231
Limitations of the cross sectional studies (chapters 3, 6 and 7)	232
Limitations of the experimental study (chapter 4).....	232
Limitations as a result of the selected scope statement.....	233
Future research avenues both conceptual and methodological.....	233
8.4. Concluding remarks based on expert interviews	236

Goal and methods	236
Theme 1: The role of politics in strategic planning	237
Theme 2: Towards flexible and participatory strategic planning.....	238
Theme 3: Optimal planning team composition.....	240
Final conclusion	241
8.5. References.....	242

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Number of articles investigating a specific link of the conceptual model.....	41
Table 2: Survey items and factor loadings of strategic-decision quality variable	71
Table 3: Survey items and factor loadings of rational planning variables.....	73
Table 4: Survey items and factor loadings of procedural justice variable.....	74
Table 5: Descriptive statistics and zero order correlations	75
Table 6: Regression results.....	76
Table 7: Descriptive statistics	105
Table 8: Balance test of differences between treatment and control groups	106
Table 9: Manipulation check: Impact of performance information treatment on perception of municipal performance, split by performance group.....	107
Table 10: Impact of performance information treatment on preferences for spending, split by performance group	108
Table 11: Impact of performance information treatment on preferences for reform, split by performance group	109
Table 12: Interaction between performance information treatment and presence of strategic goal on spending preferences, split by performance group	111
Table 13: Interaction between performance information treatment and presence of strategic goal on reform preferences, split by performance group.....	112
Table 14: Summary of replication findings compared to theory and original findings.....	114
Table 15: Selected articles and research design	131
Table 16: Research focus concerning micro-activities and outcomes of SP	137
Table 17: Relations between practitioners and outcomes of SP	144
Table 18: Relations between practices and outcomes of SP.....	146
Table 19: Exploratory factor analysis of independent variables	170

Table 20: PLS factor loadings.....	174
Table 21: Descriptive statistics.....	175
Table 22: Inter-construct correlations and average variance extracted (AVE)	176
Table 23: PLS path modelling results	176
Table 24: Descriptive statistics for the research constructs	198
Table 25: Unstandardized estimates and confidence interval limits for the mediation tests	201
Table 26: Assessment of theoretical frameworks.....	222

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual framing of PhD manuscript	14
Figure 2: Methodological framing of PhD manuscript	20
Figure 3: Strategic management processes in public organizations, adaptation from Poister et al. (2010)	34
Figure 4: The applied data collection process.....	40
Figure 5: Predictors of strategic-decision quality in public organizations.....	64
Figure 6: Micro-activities and outcomes of strategic planning, adaption from Wolf and Floyd (2013)	127
Figure 7: Hypothesized model.....	189
Figure 8: Final structural model	202

SUMMARY (IN ENGLISH)

Although strategic planning has been an area of investigation within public management research for more than two decades, the debate about the effectiveness of strategic planning processes for public organizations is ongoing. Nevertheless, this ongoing debate on whether or not strategic planning actually “works” in the public sector has not stopped governments worldwide from mandating some form of strategic planning to public organizations within their jurisdiction. An **important contradiction** thus emerges. On the one hand, we do not yet know whether strategic planning actually delivers on its promises and, on the other hand, we are seeing the implementation of strategic planning throughout the public sector. My doctoral manuscript seeks to address this contradiction by **empirically examining** the effectiveness of strategic planning in public organizations. Specifically, I adopt a strategic decision-making lens to investigate strategic planning effectiveness both at the individual and organizational level. Data are drawn from previously published research articles, Flemish municipalities, Flemish student council centers and respondents include both politicians as well as administrative staff.

After a general introduction into my doctoral manuscript (chapter one), the first three papers of this manuscript (chapters two, three & four) offer a **helicopter perspective** on strategic planning effectiveness in public organizations. Building on the work of Theodore Poister and John Bryson, two highly-cited scholars in the field of public-sector strategic planning, I operationalize strategic planning as a systematic, analytic and rational approach to strategy formulation and, as such, as a crucial starting point of strategic management. Strategic management, however, has a broader scope than strategic planning and also includes instruments such as performance measurement and performance management to guide strategy implementation and evaluation. The first three papers seek to incorporate this nuance. Next, chapters five, six and seven are the result of three papers that adopt a **deep dive approach** to strategic planning effectiveness in public organizations. These three chapters look at how specific elements of strategic planning processes, such as the level of participation during strategic planning or the characteristics of planning team members, influence strategic planning effectiveness. Finally, in chapter eight I discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of my doctoral manuscript and present avenues for future research.

I conclude with recommendations for public managers and policymakers by drawing on a series of **expert interviews** which refine the developed empirical insights. In what follows, I briefly summarize the core findings of chapters two to eight.

Chapter two is the starting point of the entire doctoral manuscript and consists of a **systematic literature review of 42 research articles** published in established (public) management journals. In this chapter, a conceptual model is presented which provides insights into (a) the determinants affecting public sector adoption of strategic management, (b) the characteristics of strategic management processes in public organizations, (c) the outcomes of these processes and (d) the empirical body of knowledge investigating the relationships between the defined determinants, characteristics and outcomes. The study finds that the adoption of strategic management by public organizations is the result of external (e.g. cooperation with private sector) and internal (e.g. budgetary resources) contingencies as well as coercive (e.g. formal legislation), mimetic (e.g. adoption of strategic management by neighboring agencies) and normative (e.g. experience of agency leadership) institutional pressures. Additionally, the findings suggest that strategic management is often operationalized as a cycle centered on plan formulation, implementation and evaluation, and each element of the cycle materializes through the interactions between practitioners (e.g. administrative staff and politicians), specific processes (e.g. strategic planning and performance measurement) and specific instruments (e.g. SWOT-analysis or strategic off-sites).

The study also uncovers some best practice recommendations for public organizations engaging in strategic management processes. These include, for instance, getting a variety of stakeholders involved in plan formulation, aligning daily operations and decision-making with the organizational plan during plan implementation and periodically monitoring key organizational information to ensure the plan still fits the changing reality of the organization. From a theoretical point of view, the study calls for evidence from public sector settings other than US and UK local government – which looks at how policymakers use strategic management processes, studies that focus on the social and attitudinal outcomes of strategic management processes (e.g. commitment to strategy, perceived quality of strategies) and studies that incorporate both behavioral aspects of strategic management (e.g. group processes during strategy making) alongside processual aspects (e.g. usage of strategic planning and performance measurement).

Chapter three and four address the above-mentioned call. First, chapter three draws on survey data from 187 decision-makers within **55 Flemish pupil guidance centers**. In this chapter, I test the relation between (a) three core elements of strategic management, namely strategic planning, performance measurement and performance management, (b) practitioner behavior during decision-making, operationalized as procedural justice of the decision-making process and (c) perceived quality of strategic decisions. The findings indicate that, in the specific context of Flemish pupil council centers, both strategic planning and performance management are associated with strategic-decision quality. Performance measurement, however, is not. Additionally, the strongest predictor of strategic-decision quality is procedural justice, which measures the extent to which decision-makers could freely exchange information during decision-making, thus supporting the argued importance of practitioner behavior as a key focal point within public-sector strategy research. Second, chapter four presents the findings of a large scale survey experiment with **1.484 Flemish city councilors and an analysis of 225 municipal strategic plans**. The goal of this chapter is to identify how politicians might behave when confronted with information drawn from strategic management processes. The findings indicate that strategic goals derived through strategic planning are positively associated with the spending preferences of politicians. Additionally, performance information showing low performance results in higher spending by politicians whereas performance information showing high performance results in a lower willingness to reform. Both findings indicate the importance of further research into how politicians react to managerial information as these reactions might not necessarily fit within a rational and managerial logic.

As indicated earlier, chapter five, six and seven take a deep dive into the characteristics of strategic planning processes in public organizations and whether these characteristics are associated with positive outcomes. Chapter five presents the findings of a **mixed research synthesis of 40 research articles** published in established public administration journals. The objective of this review is threefold. First, the review adopts a conceptual framework that operationalizes the potential relations between characteristics and outcomes of strategic planning within organizations and discusses the relevance of this framework for public management. Second, the review identifies which elements of the framework have already been investigated within the public administration literature. Third, the review integrates the findings of the 40

articles in order to identify some meta-analytic insights into the effectiveness of strategic planning processes in public organizations. The research synthesis offers evidence that the adoption of a formal strategic planning process, which includes internal and external stakeholders and is supported by the top management and policymakers of the organization, is associated with positive outcomes for public organizations. Several gaps are also identified. For instance, limited attention has been attributed to the individual practitioners involved in strategic planning processes in the public sector. Additionally, although one of the main assumed benefits of strategic planning is enhanced decision-making, there is limited empirical evidence supporting this claim. We simply need more insights into how and if strategic planning can contribute to decision-making in public organizations.

Chapter six and seven are the result of my endeavor to address these gaps. In chapter six, I employ survey data gathered from 271 planning team members in **89 Flemish municipalities** to test whether two core elements of strategic planning, namely the formality of the process and the level of participation during the process, are associated with strategic-decision quality. The findings suggest that strategic planning can indeed contribute to strategic-decision quality in public organizations, but that this contribution is contingent on the extent to which a systematic, stepwise process is followed to develop a formal plan and a variety of stakeholders are included throughout the planning process. Finally, in chapter seven I focus on **439 planning team members responsible for plan formulation, from 203 Flemish municipalities**. Specifically, chapter seven identifies how these planning team members can become champions of the strategic plan by being fully committed to its implementation. This chapter again illustrates the importance of a behavioral perspective on strategic planning because planning team members with a creating cognitive style (i.e. labelled as individuals who are early adopters, creative, intuitive) are more likely to accept the strategic planning process and be committed to the implementation of the strategic plan.

Conclusively, chapter eight includes policy recommendations based on interviews with **key stakeholders** within the Flemish local government setting (e.g. City of Ghent, Flemish Government, IDEA Consult). These recommendations are clustered within three categories: The role of politics in strategic planning (e.g. politicians' perceived importance of plans), strategic planning process characteristics (e.g. importance of flexibility) and planning team composition (e.g. including creators as team members).

SUMMARY (IN DUTCH)

Ondanks dat onderzoek over strategische planning in de publieke sector reeds meer dan twee decennia bestrijkt, is het debat over de effectiviteit van strategische planning voor publieke organisaties nog steeds prominent aanwezig in de literatuur. Dit debat, en de onopgeloste vraag of planning wel werkt in de publieke sector, heeft beleidsmakers wereldwijd er echter niet van weerhouden om elementen van strategische planning verplicht op te leggen aan publieke organisaties. We kunnen dus een belangrijke **contradictie** waarnemen. Enerzijds is er een gebrek aan empirisch bewijs dat de effectiviteit van strategische planning in de publieke sector aantoonst en anderzijds blijkt strategische planning meer en meer aan populariteit te winnen in publieke organisaties. Mijn doctoraat tracht deze contradictie enigszins te beantwoorden door een **empirisch onderzoek** te voeren naar de effectiviteit van strategische planning in publieke organisaties. Specifiek bekijk ik strategische planning vanuit een strategisch besluitvormingsperspectief op zowel organisatie als individueel niveau. Hiervoor maak ik gebruik van data verzameld in reeds gepubliceerde studies, Vlaamse steden en gemeenten, Vlaamse centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding en bij zowel politici als ambtenarij.

Na een algemene introductie (hoofdstuk één), bekijk ik in hoofdstuk twee, drie en vier de effectiviteit van strategische planning vanuit een **helikopterbenadering**. Verder bouwend op het werk van Theodore Poister en John Bryson, twee experts in het domein van strategische planning voor publieke organisaties, operationaliseer ik strategische planning als een systematische, analytische en rationele benadering van strategieformulering en, zodoende, als een cruciaal startpunt van strategisch management. Echter, strategisch management heeft een bredere scope dan enkel strategische planning en bevat ook instrumenten als prestatiemeting en prestatie management ter ondersteuning van strategie implementatie en evaluatie. Hoofdstuk twee, drie en vier trachten deze nuance mee te nemen door strategische planning te bekijken binnen een set van andere strategisch managementinstrumenten. Vervolgens adopteren hoofdstuk vijf, zes en zeven een diepgaande, **granulaire benadering** van strategische planning. In deze hoofdstukken bekijk ik het belang van specifieke elementen van het strategisch planningsproces, zoals bijvoorbeeld de mate van participatie tijdens planning of de kenmerken van planningsteamleden. Ten slotte

bevat hoofdstuk acht de theoretische en praktische bijdrage van mijn manuscript alsook toekomstige onderzoekspistes. Ik concludeer met aanbevelingen voor publiek managers en beleidsmakers op basis van **expertinterviews**, met als doel de empirische inzichten van mijn doctoraat te verfijnen. In wat volgt, vat ik kort de kernbevindingen samen van hoofdstuk twee tot acht.

Hoofdstuk twee is het vertrekpunt van het volledig doctoraal manuscript en bevat een **systematische literatuurstudie van 42 artikelen** gepubliceerd in top tijdschriften. Dit hoofdstuk bevat een conceptueel model dat inzicht biedt in (a) de determinanten van strategisch management in de publieke sector, (b) de kenmerken van strategisch managementprocessen in publieke organisaties, (c) de uitkomsten van deze processen en (d) de huidige empirische inzichten met betrekking tot de relaties tussen (a), (b) en (c). De studie toont aan dat de adoptie van strategisch management door publieke organisaties gerelateerd is aan externe (b.v. samenwerking met private sector) en interne (b.v. budgettaire middelen) contingenties alsook institutionele druk (b.v. formele wetgeving, ervaring van leidinggevende). Bovendien illustreert deze studie dat strategisch management geoperationaliseerd kan worden als een cyclus gaande van het formuleren, implementeren en evalueren van plannen, en elk element van deze cyclus komt tot stand door middel van een interactie tussen individuen (b.v. politici en ambtenaren), processen (b.v. strategische planning en prestatiemeting) en specifieke instrumenten (b.v. SWOT-analyse of strategische off-sites).

Hoofdstuk twee biedt ook aanbevelingen voor publieke organisaties die een strategisch management proces adopteren. Voorbeelden zijn de inclusie van verschillende stakeholders bij het formuleren van plannen, het afstemmen van dagelijkse operaties en besluitvorming op de strategie tijdens de implementatie van het plan en het voorzien van een periodieke monitoring van informatie uit de omgeving van de organisatie opdat het plan tijdig kan geëvalueerd en bijgestuurd worden. Vanuit theoretisch perspectief, concludeert de studie met een oproep naar meer empirisch onderzoek in publieke organisaties buiten de VS en de VK alsook in een andere publieke context dan lokale besturen. Bovendien argumenteert de studie de nood aan meer inzicht in hoe beleidsmakers strategisch management processen gebruiken, hoe strategisch management kan bijdragen aan sociale en gedragsmatige uitkomsten zoals betrokkenheid bij de strategie en hoe zowel gedrag tijdens strategisch management (b.v. groepsprocessen tijdens

strategieontwikkeling) alsook de gebruikte processen (b.v. strategische planning en prestatiemeting) bijdragen aan positieve uitkomsten.

Hoofdstuk drie en vier beantwoorden bovenstaande nood. Hoofdstuk drie maakt gebruik van surveydata verzameld bij 187 respondenten in **55 Vlaamse centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding**. In dit hoofdstuk test ik de relatie tussen (a) drie kernelementen van strategisch management, namelijk strategische planning, prestatiemeting en prestatie management, (b) gedrag van individuen tijdens besluitvorming, geoperationaliseerd als procedurele rechtvaardigheid van het besluitvormingsproces en (c) de gepercipieerde kwaliteit van strategische beslissingen. De resultaten tonen aan dat strategische planning en prestatie management positief geassocieerd zijn met de gepercipieerde kwaliteit van strategische beslissingen. Prestatiemeting heeft echter geen significant effect in de centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding. Bovendien is de sterkste predictor van kwaliteit de procedurele rechtvaardigheid van het besluitvormingsproces, een maatstaf voor de mate waarin informatie vrijuit kan gedeeld worden tijdens besluitvorming, wat het belang van gedrag tijdens strategisch managementprocessen in publieke organisaties bevestigt. Hoofdstuk vier, vervolgens, bevat de bevindingen van een grootschalig experiment bij **1.484 Vlaamse gemeenteraadsleden alsook een analyse van 225 gemeentelijke meerjarenplannen**. Het doel van dit hoofdstuk is om te identificeren hoe politici mogelijk reageren wanneer ze geconfronteerd worden met informatie uit strategisch managementprocessen. De bevindingen tonen aan dat strategische doelstellingen bepaald door middel van strategische planning positief geassocieerd zijn met budgetteringsvoorkeuren van politici. Bovendien blijkt dat informatie over “slechte” prestatie leidt tot een hogere budgetallocatie aan het slecht presterende domein waar informatie over “goede” prestatie leidt tot een aversie voor hervorming van het goed presterende domein. Beide bevindingen illustreren het belang van toekomstig onderzoek dat bekijkt hoe politici reageren op managementinformatie aangezien deze reacties niet noodzakelijk verklaarbaar zijn vanuit een rationele, managementlogica.

Zoals eerder besproken maken hoofdstuk vijf, zes en zeven gebruik van een granulair perspectief op de kenmerken van strategische planning in publieke organisaties en bestudeer ik of deze kenmerken geassocieerd zijn met positieve uitkomsten. Hoofdstuk vijf bevat een **onderzoeksynthese van 40 kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve studies** gepubliceerd in top bestuurskundige tijdschriften. De doelstelling

van deze synthese is drievoudig. Ten eerste maakt de studie gebruik van een conceptueel raamwerk dat de mogelijke relaties tussen kenmerken en uitkomsten van strategische planning operationaliseert. Ik bespreek ook de relevantie van dit raamwerk voor publiek management. Ten tweede identificeert de studie welke elementen van dit raamwerk reeds onderzocht werden in de bestuurskundige literatuur. Ten derde integreert de studie de bevindingen van 40 artikelen met als doel meta-analytische inzichten te verschaffen. De onderzoeksynthese biedt empirisch bewijs dat een formeel strategisch planningsproces, dat zowel interne als externe stakeholders betreft en dat ondersteund wordt door top managers en beleidsmakers in de organisatie, geassocieerd is met positieve uitkomsten voor publieke organisaties. De studie identificeert ook verschillende onderzoeknoden. Zo is er nood aan aandacht voor de individuen die betrokken zijn in strategische planning en is er weinig bewijs dat strategische planning bijdraagt aan besluitvorming.

Hoofdstuk zes en zeven beantwoorden deze noden. In hoofdstuk zes gebruik ik surveydata verzameld bij 271 planningsteamleden in **89 Vlaamse steden en gemeenten** om te testen of de formaliteit van en de mate van participatie tijdens strategische planning geassocieerd zijn met de gepercipieerde kwaliteit van het meerjarenplan. De resultaten bevestigen een positieve bijdrage van strategische planning, maar enkel indien er gebruik wordt gemaakt van een systematisch, stapsgewijs proces voor planontwikkeling en top managers en beleidsmakers alsook niet-leidinggevende medewerkers en externe stakeholders betrokken worden bij planontwikkeling. Ten slotte onderzoek ik in hoofdstuk zeven **439 planningsteamleden verantwoordelijk voor planformulering** in Vlaamse steden en gemeenten. Specifiek onderzoek ik hoe deze leden “kampioen” kunnen worden van het meerjarenplan. Dit hoofdstuk bevestigt het belang van een gedragsmatige lens op strategische planning aangezien leden met een creatieve cognitieve stijl (d.z. creatieve individuen, die houden van innovatie en intuïtief ingesteld zijn) sneller strategische planning aanvaarden alsook een hogere betrokkenheid vertonen om het plan te implementeren.

Hoofdstuk acht, ten slotte, bevat beleidsaanbevelingen op basis van **expertinterviews** met stakeholders van de Vlaamse lokale besturen (b.v. Stad Gent, Vlaamse Overheid, IDEA Consult). Deze aanbevelingen zijn geclusterd in drie categorieën: de rol van politiek in strategische planning (b.v. het gepercipieerde belang van plannen bij politici), kenmerken van het strategisch planningsproces (b.v. belang van flexibiliteit) en planning team compositie (b.v. de rol van creatievelingen als planningsteamleden).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The goal of this section is to introduce the reader(s) to the focal topic of my doctoral manuscript. Specifically, the introduction starts with an outline of the research problem. Next, I formulate the scope statement underlying this manuscript, which includes a clear framing of what I consider as strategic planning and strategic decision-making in public organizations. The conceptual as well as methodological overview of chapters two to eight is also presented and I conclude with the awards, publications and conference presentations obtained during my doctoral project.

1.1. Outline of research problem

Strategic planning in public organizations can be defined as “a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is (its identity), what it does (its strategies and actions), and why it does it (mandates, mission, goals, and the creation of public value)” (Bryson 2010, S256). Although strategic planning in public organizations can be traced back to the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was the New Public Management (NPM) movement of the 1980s that made strategic planning an ubiquitous practice among public organizations (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013). NPM even inspired governments worldwide to mandate strategic planning’s adoption for a variety of public organizations (e.g. US Government Performance and Results Act and UK Local Government Act) (Boyne 2001, Poister and Streib 2005).

One of the main reasons why strategic planning gained this almost normative status, is the fact that strategic planning’s systematic, analytic and rational approach to strategy formulation is assumed to be beneficial to public organizations (Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Bryson 2011, Poister and Streib 2005, Walker and Boyne 2006). Frequently cited benefits include enhanced strategic decision-making, greater coherence within the organization, improved communication within the organization, higher levels of commitment and support from internal and external stakeholders, enhanced intraorganizational coordination and improved organizational performance (Boyne 2001, Bryson 2011, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Walker et al. 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the widespread adoption of strategic planning by public organizations as well as its often proclaimed relation with organizational outcomes (Boyne 2001), the debate about the effectiveness of strategic planning is ongoing (Bovaird 2008, Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann 2011). After all, Mintzberg (1994) did declare the fall of strategic planning over two decades ago. As such, strategic planning's presumed value has been suggested to be "a shot in the dark" (Walker and Boyne 2006, 375) as the complex relation between strategic planning and organizational outcomes in public organizations remains unknown (Boyne 2001).

The lack of insights into the relation between strategic planning and organizational outcomes in public organizations has been suggested to be the result of limited scholarly attention to the macro-level and micro-level of strategic planning (Bryson 2010, Poister 2010). Previous research displayed the tendency to interpret strategic planning as a stand-alone, fixed routine that directly results in organizational performance thus neglecting the micro-processes that constitute strategic planning as well as strategic planning's role within the broader rational planning toolbox (Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010). First, at the macro-level strategic planning is typically an element of a rational planning cycle within public organizations, where plans are formulated through strategic planning, implemented through performance measurement and evaluated through performance management (Boyne 2001, Poister and Streib 2005). Second, at the micro-level, strategic planning consists of a set of micro-processes including the process characteristics of the strategic planning process, the individuals and teams involved in strategic planning and the strategy tools employed during strategic planning (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). Hence, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards (2010, 540) conclude that the knowledge deficit on the macro-level and micro-level of strategic planning in public organizations is so large "that it is difficult to envision recommending too much research".

In addition to the lack of insights into the macro-level and micro-level of strategic planning in public organizations, another critical issue emerges in the public management literature. Specifically, one of the main reasons underlying strategic planning's popularity in the public sector is its assumed impact on strategic decision-making (Boyne 2001, Walker and Boyne 2006). For instance, Poister (2005, 1053) argues that strategic planning can "provide overall direction for major decisions throughout the organization on

an ongoing basis". Boyne (2001, 76) states that rational planning practices such as strategic planning allow "decisions between alternative strategies to be taken logically on the basis of comprehensive information, rather than intuitively on the basis of incomplete or inaccurate data". Empirical evidence supporting these claims is, however, scarce and we know little about the relation between strategic planning and strategic decision-making in public organizations. This is a particularly salient issue for public management scholars because the origins of rational planning lie within the strategic decision-making literature, where it is considered a counterbalance to purely political or intuitive decision-making processes (e.g. Elbanna and Child 2007, Elbanna 2006). One could thus argue that a core benefit underlying rational planning practices such as strategic planning should be their contribution to strategic decision-making within public organizations but we have only limited evidence supporting this argument.

Conclusively, the research problem underlying current academic endeavors on strategic planning in public organizations is threefold. First, strategic planning is often considered a stand-alone process whereas, in practice, it is typically an element of a rational planning cycle which also includes performance measurement and performance management. Second, strategic planning is often operationalized as a fixed routine, which typically disregards the micro-processes that constitute strategic planning such as the actual practitioners responsible for plan formulation. Third, although one of the core theoretical benefits on strategic planning should be its impact on strategic decision-making in public organizations, there is only limited empirical evidence supporting this claim. In my doctoral manuscript, I seek to address these issues by (a) investigating strategic planning both at the micro and macro level and (b) providing empirical evidence on if and how strategic planning can indeed contribute to strategic decision-making within the public sector. Hence, the two interconnected research questions (**RQ**) underlying this manuscript are:

RQ1: Does strategic planning, at the macro level, contribute to strategic decision-making in public organizations? (*IF-question*)

RQ2: Which characteristics of strategic planning, at the micro level, can help to account for this potential contribution? (*HOW-question*)

1.2. Scope statement of doctoral manuscript

Before elaborating on the conceptual and methodological rationale underlying my manuscript, I first seek to clarify the scope of my doctoral work. Indeed, as indicated in several chapters throughout my manuscript, semantic and conceptual discussions underlie the strategic planning and strategic decision-making literature. The objective of my PhD is not to solve this debate, but rather to focus on specific literature streams and seek to contribute to those streams. In order to clarify this contribution, I define the core concepts of my manuscript as follows:

Strategic planning in public organizations: Throughout this manuscript, strategic planning is defined as a systematic, analytic and rational approach to strategy formulation. Typically, such an approach includes the stepwise formulation of a formal plan, an analysis of the organization's internal and external environment (e.g. through a SWOT-analysis¹), and defining strategic goals based on this analysis. This definition is in line with the operationalization of some of the most prominent strategic planning scholars in public management (Bryson 2010, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013). Additionally, in this manuscript strategic planning is considered as an "intended strategy formulation process", which implies that some formal document (i.e. a plan) is produced at a specific moment in time including specific goals that the organization sets out to achieve (Mintzberg 1978). Importantly, as Mintzberg (1978) taught us, I acknowledge the existence of "emergent strategies" that are made on a daily basis within public organizations, for instance based on political processes and changing environments, and that might undermine the content of the plan or minimize its importance. Nevertheless, such emergent strategies are not within the scope of this doctoral manuscript. Moreover, due to the highly politicized nature of public organizations, there are typically also political documents (e.g. coalition agreement) that co-exist next to strategic plans. How these political documents are formulated and/or influence the plan is, again, not within the scope of this manuscript.

Strategic decision-making in public organizations: This manuscript operationalizes strategic planning effectiveness by drawing on the perceptual strategic decision-making literature (e.g. Olson, Parayitam, and

¹ S = Strengths, W = Weaknesses, O = Opportunities and T = Threats.

Bao 2007, Parayitam and Dooley 2009). This implies that the outcome variable of interest are the perceptions of planning team members (i.e. the individuals responsible for formulating and implementing the plan) towards plans and/or a set of decisions resulting from the plan. These perceptions are not merely of scholarly interest, previous research has found that planning team members with positive perceptions towards plans or decisions are more likely to successfully implement these throughout the organizations (Yang, Sun, and Eppler 2009). These planning team members thus become “champions” of the plan or decisions by supporting their implementation and convincing other individuals to go along with the requested changes (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). Focusing on planning team members’ perceptions thus ties in with the perspective that strategic planning is a social process, during which a planning team uses instruments and processes to define strategies that they believe are the best course of action for the organization and that they are committed to actually achieve (Eden 1992). Additionally, because these planning team members are, predominantly, administrative staff and strategic decision-making in public organizations is highly politicized (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015), an additional paper is included in the manuscript (see chapter four). This paper moves beyond the perceptual strategic decision-making literature by offering experimental evidence for the impact of strategic planning on actual strategic decision-making behavior by politicians.

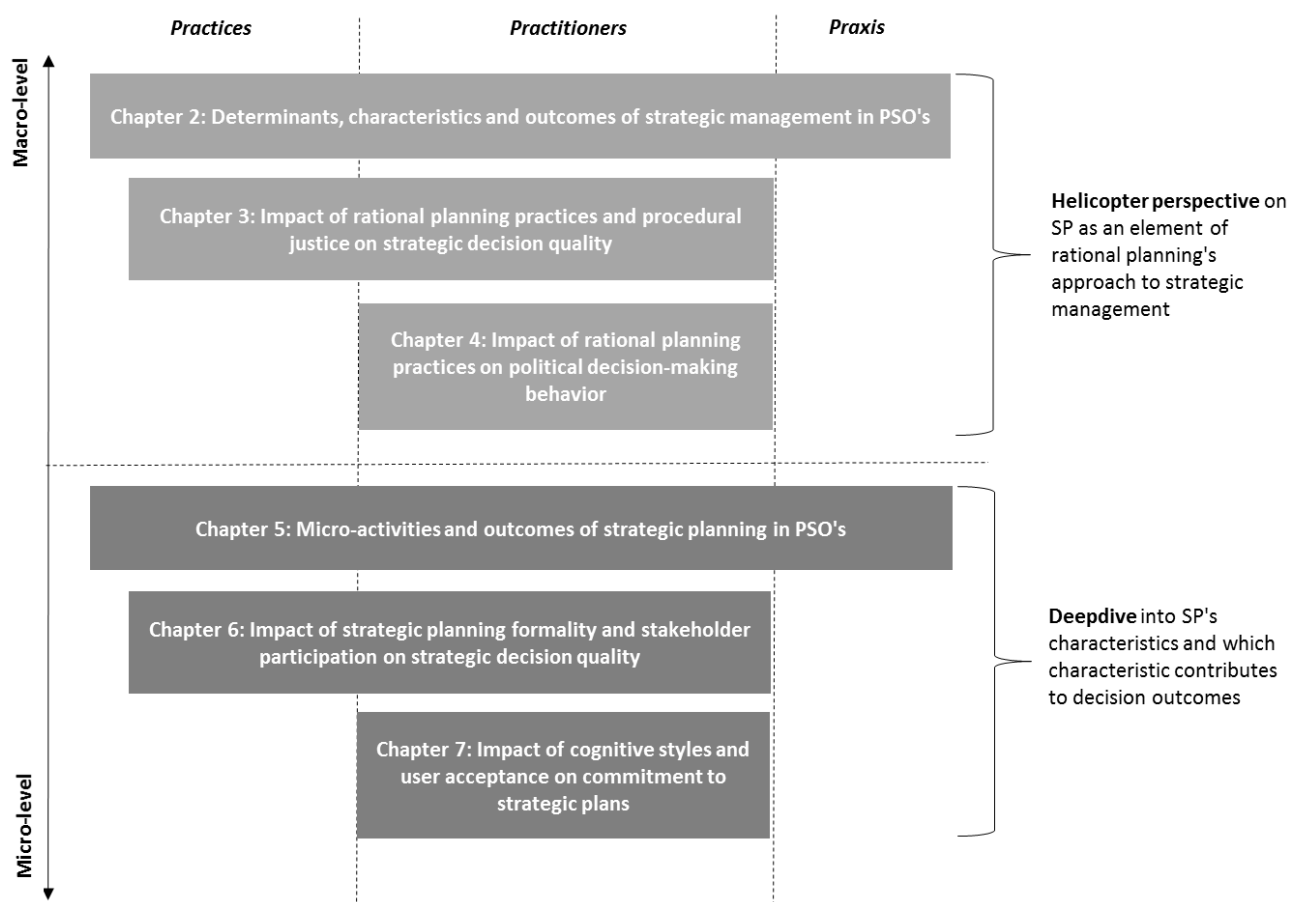
Conceptualization of “strategic” in public organizations: One could argue whether and when strategic plans and strategic decisions are truly “strategic” in public organizations. Indeed, plans might be mandated by central governments, which is the case in Flemish municipalities (see chapter four, six and seven), and one could wonder whether the formulated plan is merely a compliance document drafted to address said mandate. Similarly, the possibility to make “strategic” decisions in public organizations might be limited because the mission and the subsequent areas of service delivery of these organizations can be mandated by law, which is the case in Flemish pupil guidance centers (see chapter three). However, both arguments are, to some extent, accounted for by the scales that I use to measure perceptions towards plans and/or a set of decisions. Specifically, as opposed to identifying what is “strategic” myself, I surveyed key organizational staff (i.e. planning team members) on the extent to which (a) they find the delivered plan or a set of decisions made by the planning team to be truly qualitative strategic decisions (i.e. strategic-

decision quality, see chapter three and six) and (b) they are committed to implement the delivered plan and support it throughout the organization (i.e. strategic-decision commitment, see chapter seven). If indeed plans or decisions are merely compliance documents or operational choices lacking any “strategic” dimension, this would likely result in a lower score on perceived strategic-decision quality and strategic-decision commitment. Additionally, in chapter four I look at strategic planning’s impact on budget allocation and reform initiatives by politicians, both of which are considered instrumental to the strategic decision-making toolbox of politicians (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015).

1.3. Conceptual overview of chapters

Having introduced the research problem as well as the scope statement, I now discuss the conceptual logic underlying the six core papers of my doctoral manuscript. This conceptual logic is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual framing of PhD manuscript



The papers can be divided into **two separate parts**. In the first part, I present a set of three papers that focus on the macro-level of strategic planning in public organizations. Specifically, these papers adopt a helicopter perspective by looking at the effectiveness of different rational planning tools for plan formulation (i.e. strategic planning), implementation (i.e. performance measurement) and evaluation (i.e. performance management). In the second part, I present a set of three papers that focus on the micro-level of strategic planning in public organizations. Specifically, these papers adopt a deep dive perspective by looking at the actual characteristics of strategic planning processes (i.e. the underlying micro processes) and how those characteristics might relate to strategic decision outcomes.

The cement throughout these papers is their focus on the **practices, practitioners and/or praxis** (3 P's) of strategic planning in public organizations. These 3 P's are core to the Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) paradigm and are aimed at understanding "how" strategic planning is executed by public organizations (Vaara and Whittington 2012). Specifically, the practitioners are "those who do the work of making, shaping and executing strategies" (Whittington 2006, 619). They include policy makers, senior executives, strategic planners, middle managers, outside strategy advisors, other external stakeholders and staff (Wolf and Floyd 2013). The practices are "shared routines of behavior, including traditions, norms and procedures for thinking, acting and using things" (Whittington 2006, 619) and center on the processes used by organizations (e.g. do organizations use strategic planning at the macro-level? What are the characteristics of this process of the micro-level?) (Wolf and Floyd 2013). Finally, the praxis is "actual activity, what people do in practice" (Whittington 2006, 619) and includes the usage of boundary documents and activities during strategic planning such as analytical tools (e.g. benchmarking and SWOT-analysis), creative tools (e.g. brainstorm sessions) and the impact of strategy workshops or strategic off-sites (Wolf and Floyd 2013).

Both the macro and micro section adopt a **similar flow**. They start off with a broad literature review that looks at all 3 P's and their relation to specific outcomes. Next, the second papers are empirical studies at the organizational level which look at how practices and practitioner elements influence strategic decision outcomes. Finally, the third papers are empirical studies at the individual level which look at how characteristics of individual practitioners can influence strategic decision outcomes. This is not a random

order, all papers are interconnected and offer a different level of detail based on the findings of their predecessors.

Chapter two kicks off the manuscript with a systematic literature review of 42 research articles. In this chapter, I focus on the rational planning cycle of plan formulation, plan implementation and plan evaluation as core elements of a strategic management process in public organizations. Specifically, I present a conceptual model which provides insights into (a) the determinants affecting public sector adoption of strategic management, (b) the characteristics (**i.e. 3 P's**) of strategic management processes in public organizations, (c) the outcomes of these processes and (d) the empirical body of knowledge investigating the relationships between the defined determinants, 3 P's and outcomes. The review concludes with a set of future research avenues.

Chapter three tests the relation between three core **rational planning practices**, namely strategic planning, performance measurement and performance management, **practitioner behavior** during decision-making, operationalized as procedural justice of the decision-making process and perceived quality of strategic decisions. Hypotheses are defined based on information processing theory. Data are derived from a survey of 187 decision-makers within 55 Flemish pupil guidance centers and analyzed by means of multivariate linear regression analysis. In doing so, chapter three addresses an important issue put forth in chapter two. By focusing on **Flemish pupil guidance centers**, chapter three offers evidence on rational planning's effectiveness in a non US, UK or local government setting. Specifically, Flemish pupil guidance centers are subjected to a **specific set of contingencies** that differ from local governments (e.g. no political layer within individual centers, limited availability of performance data, focused on hard-to-measure services such as wellbeing of pupils), making it interesting to see whether rational planning practices still “work” in such a setting.

Chapter four focuses exclusively on the **political practitioners** underlying rational planning practices by looking at the impact of strategic planning and performance measurement on decision-making by politicians. Specifically, the chapter draws on a randomized survey experiment with 1.484 Flemish city councilors and an analysis of 225 municipal strategic plans to test the relation between strategic goals

derived through strategic planning, performance information drawn from performance measurement systems and politicians' preferences for spending and reform. Hypotheses are defined based on blame avoidance theory. Both logistic and linear regression models are used to analyze the data. By focusing on politicians, chapter four is linked to several key findings of chapter two – such as the necessity of evidence on how **policymakers** use strategic management processes.

Next, **chapter five** kicks off the **micro level section** of my manuscript and presents the findings of a mixed research synthesis of 40 research articles. The review adopts a SAP-based conceptual framework that operationalizes the relations between characteristics (**i.e. 3 P's**) and outcomes of strategic planning within public organizations, identifies which elements of the framework have already been investigated within the public administration literature and integrates the findings of the 40 articles to identify some meta-analytic insights. The mixed research synthesis concludes with both an integration of our current research knowledge as well as a set of theory-driven future research avenues.

In **chapter six**, survey data gathered from 271 planning team members in 89 Flemish municipalities are used to test whether the **practice** of strategic planning formality and the **practitioners** participating in strategic planning are associated with strategic-decision quality. Hypotheses are defined based on rational planning theory and integrative stakeholder participation theory. Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares is used to analyze the data. This chapter builds on chapter five by **replicating** the two main findings of chapter five (**i.e. a formal and participatory strategic planning process is associated with positive outcomes for public organizations**) within the specific empirical setting of Flemish municipalities and with an outcome variable drawn from the strategic decision-making literature.

Finally, in **chapter seven** survey data gathered from 439 **planning team members** in 203 Flemish municipalities are used to identify how these planning team members can become champions of the strategic plan by being fully committed to its implementation. Hypotheses are defined based on information processing theory. Structural equation modeling is used to analyze the data. This chapter again builds on calls put forth by chapter five by exclusively focusing on the practitioners of strategic planning in public

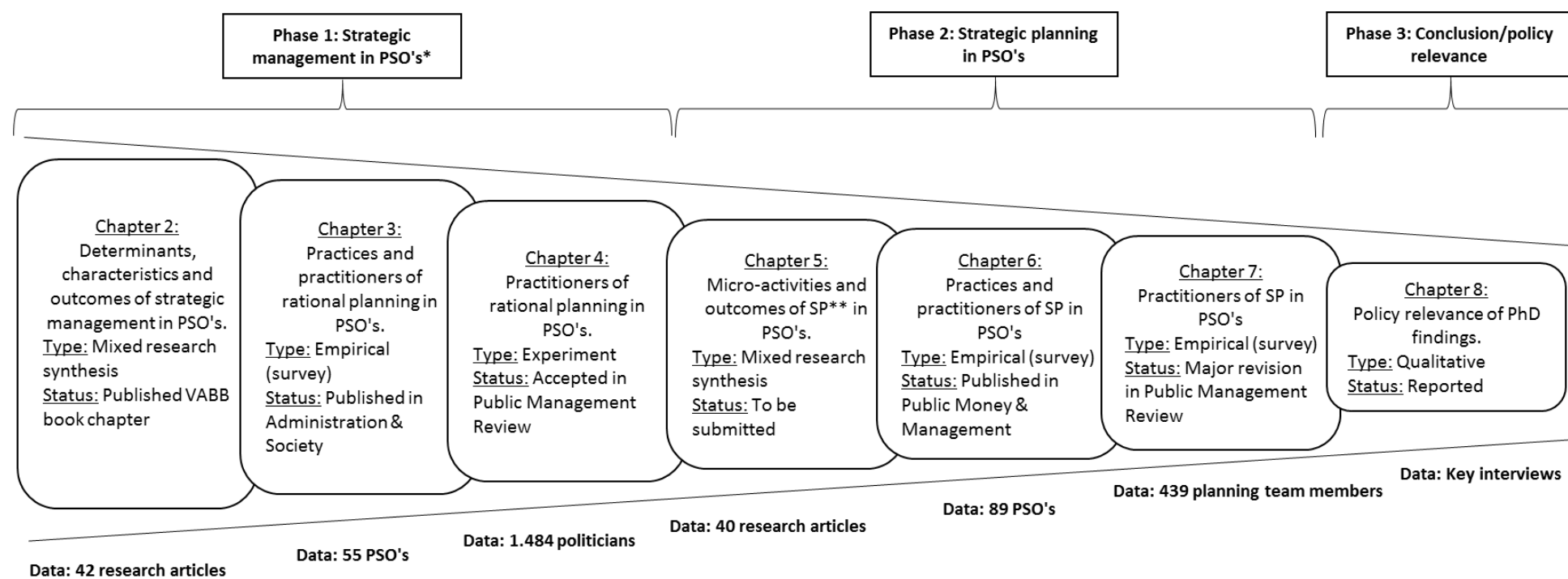
organizations and by using concepts drawn from **psychology** (i.e. cognitive styles) to predict the behavioral intentions of planning team members in a public sector setting.

Conclusively, the manuscript at hand offers several conceptual contributions to the strategic planning and public management literature. The main contributions are fourfold. First, a typical criticism of strategic planning research in general is its **lack of theoretical frameworks** (Wolf and Floyd 2013). This manuscript defines hypotheses on strategic planning's contribution based on four different theoretical frameworks (i.e. information-processing theory, blame avoidance theory, integrative stakeholder participation theory and rational planning theory) – thus allowing us to assess the relevance of as well as refine these frameworks for future strategic planning research. Second, empirical research on strategic planning in public organizations has typically centered on the direct relation between strategic planning and **organizational performance** (e.g. Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Jimenez 2013) – thus neglecting potential process outcomes that might precede performance. The manuscript strongly focuses on the strategic decision-making impact of strategic planning, which is an often-assumed process outcome of planning in the public sector (Walker and Boyne 2006, Boyne 2001). Third, some of the leading scholars in public-sector strategic planning have argued the necessity of studies that consider strategic planning as **a practice** in public organizations, something they “do” as opposed to solely “have” (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009, Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010). By drawing on the strategy-as-practice framework as an overarching conceptual model as well as a framework for the literature reviews, this manuscript offers insights into how strategic planning has been practiced within public organizations. Fourth, public-sector planning research has typically centered on the **organizational level** (e.g. Andrews et al. 2009, Poister and Streib 2005), thus neglecting the impact that planning might have on individuals (e.g. employees, managers, politicians) within public organizations. The manuscript incorporates two papers that exclusively focus on planning's impact at the individual level (i.e. politicians and planning team members), thus adopting a different level of analysis than most previous studies on the subject. Hence, the manuscript's main contributions lie in its **(a)** theory-driven nature, **(b)** focus on process outcomes of public-sector strategic planning, **(c)** assessment of strategic planning as a practice within public organizations and **(d)** inclusion of individual-oriented studies that complement the current organizational research focus.

1.4. Methodological overview of chapters

Having discussed the conceptual overview of the chapters, I now present the methodological rationale underlying my doctoral manuscript. This methodological rationale is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Methodological framing of PhD manuscript



*PSO's = Public sector organizations

**SP = Strategic planning

In their literature review on strategic planning and management in public organizations, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards (2010, 541) argue that a “mix of methods that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data would be the strongest approach for research in strategic planning and management to take”. Simultaneously, they also argue that “more large-N quantitative analyses [...] are needed to test specific hypotheses [...] so that findings can be generalized across a variety of settings” (Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010, 541). The methods incorporated into my manuscript aim to address both calls.

As will be apparent to the reader, the doctoral manuscript at hand employs the philosophical underpinnings of positivism in most of the chapters. Three core aspects typically constitute a **positivist approach**: (a) the goal is to offer, to some extent, evidence-based insights that are generalizable towards a specific population, (b) to employ existing theoretical frameworks to formulate hypotheses and, subsequently, test these hypotheses to see whether these are (partially) confirmed or rejected and (c) to objectify and quantify data-gathering as much as possible in order to avoid researcher-related biases (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2007). Hence, the empirical studies of this manuscript (chapter 3, 4, 6 and 7) employ large-n studies to allow generalization to a specific population, deductively use theoretical frameworks to define hypotheses that are tested based on data and, finally, employ quantification and objectification of data through closed-ended surveys and statistical analysis. However, I would argue that the manuscript – and specifically chapter 2, 5 and 8 – also acknowledges the limitations of a purely positivist approach, including a potential disconnection from and oversimplification of the practice of strategic planning in public organizations. Thus, chapter 2 and 5 integrate insights from both qualitative and quantitative studies to generate a state of the art on strategic management and strategic planning in public organizations whereas chapter 8 draws on several expert interviews with practitioners that are aimed at refining the findings of the empirical studies in order to generate practitioner-relevant knowledge. Conclusively, the research methods underlying the empirical body of this manuscript are optimally placed within a **post-positivist framework**, where a sequential explanatory mixed method design is used to further “explain and interpret quantitative results by collecting and analyzing follow-up qualitative data”, while predominantly adopting a quantitative research perspective (Creswell 2009, 211). In what follows, I elaborate on the specific designs per chapter.

Chapters two and five are both literature reviews that draw on a **mixed research synthesis** design (Sandelowski et al. 2012). Such a design includes (a) a data collection process based on a systematic literature review and (b) an integration of research evidence drawn from both qualitative and quantitative studies - where findings by both types of studies are considered as mutually reinforcing, mixed research evidence. This implies that “the methodological differences between qualitative and quantitative studies are minimized as both kinds of studies are viewed as producing findings that can readily be transformed into each other” (Sandelowski, Voils, and Barroso 2006, 29). If a statistical meta-analysis is selected as opposed to a mixed research synthesis, this results in a loss of the qualitative studies as these typically do not present the type of statistical data (i.e. effect sizes) fit for statistical data aggregation. Hence, the mixed research synthesis allows me to analyze both **qualitative and quantitative studies** while simultaneously providing some form of integration in the literature reviews – which ties in with the argument of Poister, Pitts and Edwards (2010).

Chapters three, four, six and seven address Poister, Pitts and Edwards’ (2010) call for **large-N studies** that test specific hypotheses aimed at generalization towards a population. These chapters thus employ a quantitative research design based on survey data and aimed at testing specific theory-driven hypotheses. In chapters three, six and seven **cross-sectional, multi-informant survey data** are used and analyzed. This survey is designed and analyzed in accordance to recommendations for optimal cross-sectional survey design and analysis in public administration scholarship (e.g. Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson 2012). Nevertheless, the cross-sectional nature of the data implies that these chapters present associations between independent and dependent variables, but cannot provide insights into causality. Chapter four, on the other hand, presents findings based on a **randomized survey experiment** which is in line with the method presented by Aguinis and Bradley (2014). Through this design, chapter four allows some interesting **causal statements** on the defined theory-driven hypotheses.

Finally, chapter eight of this manuscript presents, apart from the conclusion, the findings of a **qualitative follow-up phase** geared towards uncovering policy implications of the six core papers. Specifically, the findings of a set of expert interviews with key stakeholders of Flemish local government are presented. These expert interviews are geared towards understanding the relevance of the empirical findings for public

organizations as well as identifying some other important aspects that are not necessarily grasped by the empirical papers. Hence, although the doctoral manuscript is largely quantitative and hypothesis-testing, this final phase allows us to identify some **intricacies** that cannot be captured by a structured survey.

1.5. Awards, publications and conference presentations

AWARDS

2016 European Academy of Management (EURAM) Best Paper Award of the Public and Nonprofit Management SIG (Paris, France).

2013 European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) Best Paper Award of the PhD Symposium (Edinburgh, Scotland).

PUBLICATIONS

Articles in journals indexed by Web-of-Science

Audenaert, Mieke, Adeliën Decramer, Bert George, Bram Verschuere, and Thomas Van Waeyenberg. 2016. "When employee performance management affects individual innovation in public organizations: the role of consistency and LMX." *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. Early view. doi: 10.1080/09585192.2016.1239220.

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George, Bert, Sebastian Desmidt, and Julie De Moyer. 2016. "Strategic-Decision Quality in Flemish Municipalities." *Public Money & Management* 36 (5):317-324.

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Peer-reviewed book chapters

George, Bert, and Sebastian Desmidt. 2014. "A State of Research on Strategic Management in the Public Sector: An Analysis of the Empirical Evidence." In *Strategic Management in Public Organizations: European Practices and Perspectives*, edited by Paul Joyce and Anne Drumaux, 151–172. New York: Routledge.

George, Bert, and Sebastian Desmidt. 2013. "Strategische planning als dominante benadering van strategisch management." In *Strategisch management : een handboek voor de publieke sector*, edited by Sebastian Desmidt and Aimé Heene, 175 - 219. Leuven: LannooCampus.

Other publications

Desmidt, Sebastian, and Bert George. 2013. "De Essentie Van Strategisch Management." *OCMW Visies 2*: 6–11.

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CHAPTER 2: A STATE OF RESEARCH ON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: A REVIEW OF EVIDENCE

Published as George, Bert, and Sebastian Desmidt. 2014. "A State of Research on Strategic Management in the Public Sector: An Analysis of the Empirical Evidence." In *Strategic Management in Public Organizations: European Practices and Perspectives*, edited by Paul Joyce and Anne Drumaux, 151–172. New York: Routledge.

ABSTRACT - Despite the widespread adoption of strategic management by public organizations, the effectiveness and nature of public strategic management is still debated. To address this issue, a conceptual model and systematic literature review are presented which provide insights into (1) the determinants affecting public sector adoption of strategic management, (2) the characteristics of public strategic management processes, (3) the outcomes of these processes and (4) the empirical body of knowledge investigating the relationships between determinants, characteristics and outcomes of public strategic management. The findings indicate that to improve our understanding of how public strategic management influences organizational outcomes, future research should employ a contingency approach which takes into account the environmental and organizational context. Additionally, New Institutional Theory and Strategy-as-Practice offer particularly useful research avenues to understand “how” public strategy-making actually takes place.

2.1. Introduction

Since its introduction in the late 1970s, New Public Management (NPM) has taken the public sector by storm and has become the dominant paradigm within the sector. In essence, NPM is a set of assumptions and value statements about how public sector organizations should be designed, organized and managed (Diefenbach 2009). Pivotal within this movement is the adoption of putative market and private sector business practices by public organizations with the aim of improving their effectiveness and realizing their goal of value maximization (Goldfinch and Wallis, 2010). One of these practices, which has been widely adopted by public organizations at all levels of government, is the concept of strategic management (Bryson et al. 2010) while instruments associated with strategic management (e.g. strategic planning, scenario planning, mission and vision statements) rapidly became almost omnipresent (Rigby and Bilodeau, 2013).

Given its ubiquitous character, strategic management processes in public organizations have been an object of academic inquiry for over two decades (Bryson et al., 2010), ranging from the inaugural prescribed strategic planning model by Bryson (1988) to recent empirical work on performance management by Poister, Pasha, and Edwards (2013). However, despite the apparent ubiquitous nature of strategic management in public organizations and its hypothesized benefits, conclusive and consistent empirical findings on the characteristics of public strategic management processes and its effectiveness remain scarce (Bryson et al. 2010). Additionally, few studies have attempted to analyze, categorize and synthesize the current state of knowledge, in order to generate a holistic view on the determinants underlying strategic management in public organizations, the characteristics of public strategic management processes, and how those characteristics and determinants could lead to positive outcomes (Hansen 2011). Paradoxically, various authors claim that such holistic view and focus on characteristics (i.e. “how” strategic management is executed in practice) is key to gain insights into the complex causality underlying the adoption of strategic management processes and its relationship with organizational performance (Vaara and Whittington 2012).

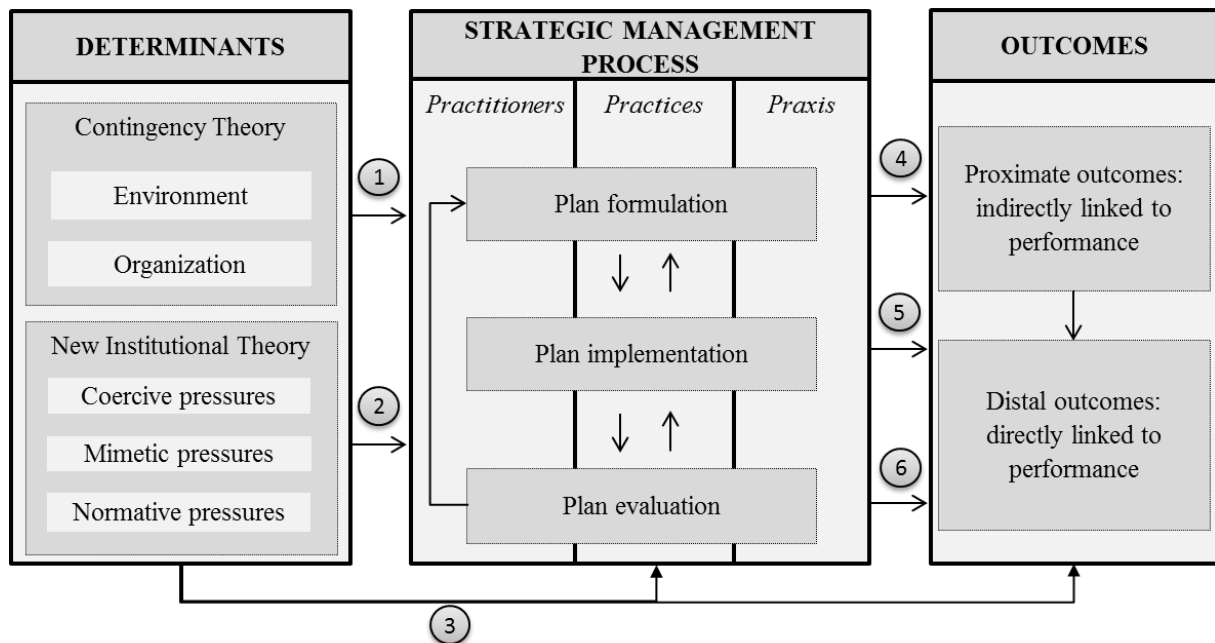
The paper at hand seeks to address these issues by means of a systematic literature review which employs a holistic conceptual framework grounded in the Strategy-as-Practice paradigm (e.g. Wolf and Floyd 2013), the public and non-profit strategic management literature (e.g. Poister et al. 2010), New Institutional

Theory (e.g. Powell and DiMaggio 1991) and Contingency Theory (e.g. Donaldson 2001) in order to “make sense of” (Bryson et al. 2009) the determinants, characteristics and outcomes of strategic management processes within public organizations. As such, this study answers the plea for more knowledge on the nature of strategic management processes within public organizations. In addition, by taking a Contingency, New Institutional and Strategy-as-Practice approach, this paper expands the scope of previous reviews (e.g. Bryson et al. 2010) and offers insights grounded in (a) two influential, established social research theories and (b) a recent constructivist shift in strategic management research (Vaara and Whittington 2012).

2.2. Conceptualizing the nature of strategic management processes in public organizations

In order to provide insights into the nature of public strategic management, we need to address three objectives, namely to (1) identify the determinants affecting both the characteristics and the adoption of public strategic management, (2) define what actually constitutes a public strategic management process and (3) explore the outcomes of public strategic management. In order to accomplish these goals, we followed the same approach as Poister et al. (2010) and developed a holistic conceptual model which depicts the causality between determinants, characteristics and outcomes of public strategic management processes. More specifically, the model uses insights derived from Contingency Theory (Donaldson 2001) and New Institutional Theory (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) to identify the determinants of public strategic management processes. Additionally, the model defines the characteristics of strategic management processes by means of (a) theoretical elements of public strategic management as cited in academic public management literature and (b) practice-oriented elements as conceptualized by the Strategy-as-Practice paradigm (Vaara and Whittington 2012). Finally, the proximate and distal outcomes of public strategic management as indicated in the model result from a recent categorization of strategic planning outcomes (Wolf and Floyd 2013). The ensuing conceptual model is presented in Figure 3. In what follows, we further elaborate on the theoretical reasoning behind the elements visualized in this conceptual model.

Figure 3: Strategic management processes in public organizations, adaptation from Poister et al. (2010)



THE DETERMINANTS OF PUBLIC STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Contingency Theory

Contingency Theory argues that the effectiveness of an organization, and its subsequent performance, is the result of a “fit” between the organization’s characteristics and its contingencies (Donaldson 2001). These contingencies include environmental determinants (e.g. volatility in the external environment) and organizational determinants (e.g. organizational size and structure) (Boyne and Meier 2009; Donaldson 2001). As a result, these determinants can also be expected to impact management practices such as public strategic management processes (Bryson et al. 2010; Poister et al. 2010).

First, environmental determinants such as the diversity and size of the client base or technological volatility can be expected to impact the adoption, characteristics and outcomes of public strategic management processes (Poister et al. 2010; Roberts and Wargo 1994; Walker and Boyne 2006). Second, the organizational configuration is also an important explanatory variable for the adoption, characteristics and effectiveness of specific management processes such as public strategic management (Paauwe 2004; Poister et al. 2010). Moreover, Poister et al. (2010, 526) argue that the “type of governing body, whether an authority board or a legislative body, and with respect to local governments in particular the form of

government (e.g. city manager vs. strong mayor systems), is also likely to affect how and to what extent strategic management processes are carried out”.

New Institutional Theory

In addition to organizational and environmental contingencies, institutional pressures are also a key driver of public strategic management processes (Poister et al. 2010). Hence, we use New Institutional Theory (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) to categorize these pressures and to analyze how they affect public strategic management processes. New Institutional Theory is particularly useful when investigating change and reform processes in public organizations as it provides insights into public sector adoption of administrative innovations (Lowndes and Wilson 2003). There are three types of pressures specifically relevant for the adoption of management instruments: coercive pressures, mimetic pressures and normative pressures.

Coercive pressures result “from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent” (Powell and DiMaggio 1991, 69). Applied to the context of public organizations, these pressures materialize for instance as the legislative initiatives which mandate elements of strategic management (e.g. formulating a strategic plan) and even describe process characteristics (e.g. citizen participation) (e.g. GPRA 1993; LGA 1999).

Mimetic pressures materialize “when organizational technologies are poorly understood (March and Olsen 1976), when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty”, as a result “organizations may model themselves on other organizations” (Powell and DiMaggio 1991, 69). For example, the Flemish decree for local authorities (Gemeentedecreet 2005) specifies specific strategic planning outputs such as producing strategic plans with objectives and performance measures (i.e. what needs to be produced), but remains ambiguous concerning process steps and instruments to achieve those outputs (i.e. how this should be produced). In their search for process models, Flemish local authorities can thus be expected to copy models from other organizations using, for instance, the explicit knowledge of consulting firms or the best practices of successful sister organizations (Ashworth et al. 2009; Berry 1994; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991).

Normative pressures stem “primarily from professionalization”, which is “the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work, to control “the production of producers” (Larson 1977), and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy” (Powell and DiMaggio 1991, 70). For example, both policy makers (e.g. elected officials) and public managers (e.g. chief administrative officers) participate to some extent in public strategic management processes (Poister and Streib 2005). Through their “professionalization”, acquired via formal education (e.g. graduate degree in public administration), experience (e.g. background in the private sector), training (e.g. in-house company training) or membership in professional organizations (e.g. organization for city managers), they can subsequently impact the applied strategic management process (Campbell 2002; Ingman et al. 2002; Jarzabkowski 2010).

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Defining the theoretical elements of public strategic management processes

In order to identify the theoretical elements of public strategic management, we first need to define the concept “public strategic management”. However, as is often the case in management research, there is no definitive, fixed or uniform definition of what strategic management processes in public organizations exactly entail (Stoney 2001). Nevertheless, some highly cited public management scholars tried to circumvent this issue by focusing on the components which constitute the theoretical elements of strategic management processes within public organizations. Walker, Andrews, Boyne, Meier, and O'Toole (2010), for example, argued that strategic management is composed of two central constructs, namely the strategy process (i.e. strategy formulation), which requires formulating actual strategies, objectives and subsequent actions (e.g. in a strategic plan), and the results of these processes (i.e. strategy content or stance), which determine how an organization adapts to new circumstances (e.g. continually prospecting for environmental opportunities, focusing more on internal processes, or simply awaiting directions from governing bodies). Poister et al. (2010), on the other hand describe strategic management as the “broader process of managing an organization in a strategic manner on a continuing basis” (Poister et al. 2010, 524), consisting of strategic planning complemented by resource management, strategy implementation, and

strategy control and evaluation. In contrast, Bryson (2010) conceptualizes strategic management as a process which integrates strategic planning and strategy implementation (also consisting of strategy evaluation) on an ongoing basis in order to achieve the organization's mission and mandates and, subsequently, generate public value. Finally, Stoney (2001) indicates that strategic planning is a key element of strategic management as it involves determining long-term goals and objectives of existential importance to the organization and constantly adapting the organization to its changing environment.

Despite the differences characterizing the cited definitions, they all stress that strategic management, in essence, consists of formulating an intended strategy (e.g. in a strategic plan) (Vinzant and Vinzant 1996), complemented by strategy implementation and evaluation (Bryson 2010; Poister et al. 2010). As a result, we operationalize the theoretical elements of strategic management, within the context of this literature review, as the fundamental management cycle of strategic plan formulation, implementation and evaluation.

Defining the social process of strategic plan formulation, implementation and evaluation

Despite the presumed rationality of the identified theoretical strategic management cycle (plan formulation, implementation and evaluation), strategy-making is more than a mere analytical process (Ackermann and Eden 2011) as it is executed by individuals working in teams with underlying "social processes" that determine strategy success (Vaara and Whittington 2012). Therefore, focusing on these social processes is warranted as they are invaluable for understanding "how" strategy actors, through strategy tools and practices, generate positive outcomes (Eden 1992; Vaara and Whittington 2012). The review at hand takes into account the relevance of strategy making as a social process by drawing on the Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P) paradigm (Vaara and Whittington 2012). The S-as-P movement, which ties in with a broader constructivist refocus in strategy literature, calls for more practice-oriented strategic management research by focusing on the "doing of strategy", substantiated as strategy practices, strategy praxis and strategy practitioners (Vaara and Whittington 2012).

Applied to the context of public strategic management, the strategy practices are linked to the level of comprehensiveness and formality of the process (e.g. employed process elements such as defining a vision, mission, developing performance management systems, aligning departmental objectives with strategic objectives) (Poister and Streib 2005; Wolf and Floyd 2013). Strategy praxis is associated with the role of specific material artifacts or tools (e.g. content of the strategic plan, analytical tools such as benchmarking, creativity workshops) produced and employed during the process of strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation (Kissler et al. 1998; Vaara et al. 2010; Wolf and Floyd 2013). Finally, the strategy practitioners are the individuals involved in strategy formulation and implementation and include: senior executives (e.g. policy maker, city manager, mayor, chief administrative officer), strategic planners (e.g. specialized internal planning department), middle managers (e.g. department heads), outside strategy advisors (e.g. consultants), other external stakeholders (e.g. labor unions) and staff (e.g. lower-level employees) and their attitudes during (e.g. open to conflict) and towards (e.g. perception of fairness) the process (Ackermann and Eden 2011; Poister and Streib 2005).

THE OUTCOMES OF PUBLIC STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

The theoretical assumption that public strategic management matters, and hence leads to positive outcomes, is elucidated by Boyne and Walker (2010):

“[S]trategic management is important because it varies across public organizations, and is not simply a trivial or redundant category once the impact of environmental and organizational variables is taken into account. Indeed, strategy shapes the impact of external and internal constraints on performance, and is, in theory, both directly and indirectly linked to performance.” (Boyne and Walker 2010, S187)

In order to generate insights into the complex direct and indirect link between public strategic management and performance as theorized by Boyne and Walker (2010), we utilize a S-as-P classification scheme of outcomes credited to strategy-making (Wolf and Floyd 2013). We distinguish two sets of outcomes: proximate outcomes (indirectly linked to performance) and distal outcomes (directly linked to performance or “ultimate” outcomes) (Wolf and Floyd 2013). Proximate outcomes refer to “the causal or processual mechanisms that explain how” strategic management “influences organizational outcomes” (Wolf and

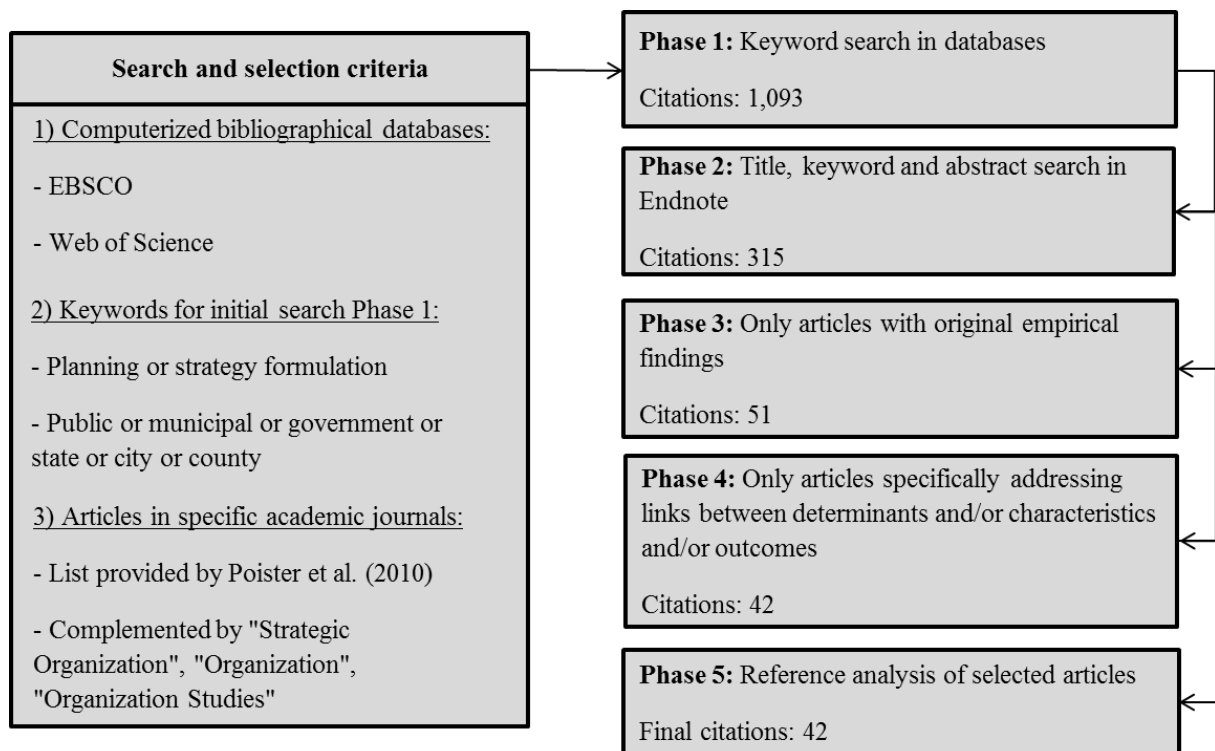
Floyd 2013, 7) and consists of such outcomes as: quality of strategic decisions, process effectiveness, coordination and shared understanding and meaning. While distal outcomes are organizational outcomes that “include organizational performance but also a number of other potential products of strategic” management (Wolf and Floyd 2013, 7), including for instance organizational performance, degree of strategy realization, organizational learning and strategic legitimacy.

2.3. Data collection process

In order to address objective four and thus explore the current empirical knowledge base in relation to our conceptual model, we first need to gather the necessary data. Subsequently, a data gathering procedure is developed based on the systematic review process of Tranfield et al. (2003) and an earlier analysis of public strategic planning processes by George and Desmidt (2013).

The first step of this review process consists of establishing a review protocol. This protocol identifies the scope of the review and acts as a decision-making instrument for including or excluding empirical articles. Based on the defined conceptual model, we decided to focus on empirical articles which specifically discuss strategic management or planning (operationalized as strategic plan formulation, implementation and evaluation) within public organizations. Additionally, these empirical articles needed to address the adoption determinants of these processes and/or the relationship between these processes and subsequent outcomes. In line with these requirements, we produced a list of search and selection criteria. Finally, the subsequent relevant data was gathered utilizing a five step-approach (Desmidt et al. 2011). Both the search and selection criteria, and the five-step data gathering approach are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: The applied data collection process



Executing the indicated five phases resulted in a list of 42 relevant empirical articles, which will be addressed in what follows.

2.4. Empirical evidence on the relationships between determinants, characteristics and outcomes of public strategic management processes

Finally, we address objective four of this paper and explore the empirical knowledge concerning the relationships between the determinants, the characteristics and the outcomes of public strategic management processes as identified in the 42 selected articles. The goal of this exploration is not to present an exhaustive overview of all the empirically tested relationships, but present the key findings and discuss opportunities for further research. To initiate this analysis, we present Table 1 that provides some preliminary insights into (1) the explored relationships, (2) the number of times a relationship is studied and (3) addressing which link in our defined model. In what follows, we further elaborate on the results of

this table and offer specific examples of cited relationships, structured around our six key conceptual linkages.

Table 1: Number of articles investigating a specific link of the conceptual model

	Plan formulation	Plan implementation	Plan evaluation		
Link 1: Contingency determinants	9	0	0		
Link 2: Institutional determinants	6	0	0		
				Proximate outcomes	Distal outcomes
Link 3:					
- Contingency determinants				11	8
- Institutional determinants				4	1
Link 4: Plan formulation				22	19
Link 5: Plan implementation				5	7
Link 6: Plan evaluation				4	5

EXPLORING LINK 1, 2 AND 3: THE IMPACT OF CONTINGENCY AND INSTITUTIONAL DETERMINANTS ON PUBLIC STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Link 1: the relationship between contingency determinants and the adoption and characteristics of public strategic management processes

The theoretical impact of the two contingency determinants (i.e. environment and organization) on public strategic management is the subject of academic inquiry in 9 empirical articles. However, this academic attention centers completely around the theoretical element of strategic plan formulation, while the impact of contingencies on strategic plan implementation or evaluation receives limited attention. Nevertheless, the identified articles provide some empirical support for the applicability of Contingency Theory to the study of public strategic management.

First, the organization's environment is identified as a driver for the adoption of strategic plan formulation processes. For instance, in the meso-environment of the organization (van Notten 2006), the size and

growth of its client base (e.g. the size and growth of the population) and the cooperation with private sector businesses are identified drivers for adopting strategic planning (Berry 1994; Ingman et al. 2002; Poister and Streib 1994; Wheeland 1993). Additionally, broader political and economic forces in the macro-environment of the organization (e.g. change in political leadership, unemployment, voter cynicism, low incomes) are cited as reasons for adopting (characteristics of) strategic plan formulation processes (Berry 1994; Kissler et al. 1998; Poister and Van Slyke 2002; Roberts and Wargo 1994).

Second, some organizational contingencies are also influential factors in the adoption of strategic plan formulation processes. Perhaps the most obvious organizational contingency, is the presence of budgetary resources (Berry 1994; Berry and Wechsler 1995). Logically, organizations with more resource slack can adopt strategic management processes without having to worry too much about the budgetary consequences (Berry 1994). Additionally, organizational contingencies can also impact the characteristics of the strategic plan formulation process. For instance, the level of required internal coordination (e.g. due to the scope of operations or different technologies) can result in a need to adapt the strategic plan formulation processes accordingly (e.g. fewer external participants, more focus on strategic issues) (Hendrick 2003; Roberts & Wargo 1994).

Link 2: the relationship between institutional determinants and the adoption and characteristics of public strategic management processes

The impact of institutional determinants (i.e. coercive, mimetic and normative pressures) on public strategic management processes is less cited as only 6 empirical articles address the topic. Similar to the contingency determinants, the academic body of knowledge focuses unilaterally on strategic plan formulation without discussing plan implementation and evaluation. However, some interesting findings in relation to New Institutional Theory are presented.

First, some form of mandate or legislative requirement is indicated as a potential adoption reason of strategic plan formulation processes. Consequently, it seems that coercive pressures (i.e. legislative provisions) mandating strategic plan formulation processes, perhaps logically, lead to the adoption of these processes (Berry and Wechsler 1995; Long and Franklin 2004; Poister 2005). However, when it concerns the

impact of coercive pressures on the characteristics of strategic plan formulation processes, the evidence is less conclusive. For instance, Franklin (2001) and Brody et al. (2003) investigate a legislative requirement stipulating widespread consultation and participation during strategic planning. Conflictingly, these authors find that this type of coercive pressure does not necessarily lead to effective participation and consultation, but that the execution of the legislative requirement is contingent upon the specific content (i.e. explicit guidelines, requirements) formalized in the mandate (Brody et al. 2003; Franklin 2001).

Second, explicit empirical evidence on mimetic pressures as institutional determinant of public strategic management is scarce. Nevertheless, two interesting findings are indicated in line with the mimetic pressures as defined by New Institutional Theory (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). The first finding states that public organizations are indeed guided by the experience of sister and/or similar agencies in their choice to adopt strategic planning processes (Berry 1994; Berry and Wechsler 1995). Additionally, recommendations of outside consultants are also identified as a mimetic pressure determining the adoption of strategic planning (Berry & Wechsler 1995).

Third, similar to mimetic pressures, the empirical evidence for the role of normative pressures on the adoption of public strategic management is limited. Nevertheless, the “professionalization” (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) of the agency leadership or executive (i.e. their experience and knowledge) drives the adoption of strategic plan formulation processes, and so do the recommendations from internal planning professionals (Berry and Wechsler 1995; Poister 2005).

Link 3: the relationship between contingency and institutional determinants and the outcomes of public strategic management processes

In addition to a link between determinants and public strategic management processes, some authors also link specific determinants directly to proximate or distal outcomes (Poister et al. 2010). As a result, contingency determinants are linked to proximate outcomes by 11 articles and to distal outcomes by 8 articles. Institutional determinants receive less attention (4 articles linked to proximate outcomes, 1 article linked to distal outcomes).

First, when looking at the impact of environmental contingencies on proximate outcomes, the effectiveness of strategic planning processes receives higher ratings in public organizations with a larger client base (e.g. population size) (Streib and Poister 1990). Conflictingly, Boyne et al. (2004) indicate that population size negatively influences another proximate outcome, namely the existence and quality of formal planning documents. Additionally, evidence concerning the impact of measures of city population on distal outcomes is presented by Walker and Boyne (2006) and Walker et al. (2010). Both articles find that the quantity (measured as deprivation) and diversity (measured as ethnic diversity) of need negatively impacts measures of organizational performance and should be taken into account as control variables (Walker et al. 2010, Walker and Boyne 2006). Aside from population, Boyne et al. (2004) also elaborate on the influence of the political environment on proximate outcomes. They find that while the political regime (e.g. Labour Party) controlling the council of local authorities does not influence the proximate outcome of existence and quality of formal planning documents, this regime does influence the proximate outcome of perceived ease of the strategic planning process (Boyne et al. 2004).

Second, the impact of organizational contingencies on public strategic management outcomes received its share of attention. More specifically, the impact of organizational resources and its positive relationship with both distal and proximate outcomes is widely documented (Andrews et al. 2009; Baker 1992; Blair 2004; Boyne et al. 2004; Kemp et al. 1993; Wheeland 1993). Subsequently, organizational resources do not only seem to lead to higher adoption rates of public strategic management processes, but also enhance the successful execution of these processes (proximate outcome) and increase organizational performance (distal outcome). In addition to organizational resources, the presence of organizational expertise (i.e. experience and skills with planning, presence of a planning unit) also has a positive effect on the proximate outcome of quality of planning documents (Boyne et al. 2002; Boyne et al. 2004). Previous organizational performance, next to organizational resources, is also a relevant control variable with a positive impact on the distal outcome of organizational performance (Andrews et al. 2009, Boyne and Chen 2007).

Third, while there is some focus on the link between contingency determinants and outcomes of public strategic management processes, little attention is given to the effect of institutional determinants on these outcomes. One institutional variable, namely the influence of external advisors or management consultants

(i.e. a key mimetic pressure), does receive some attention in several US-based case studies on different governmental levels due to its positive impact on proximate outcomes (e.g. the successful completion of a strategic planning process) (Bryson and Roering 1988; Kemp et al. 1993; Kissler et al. 1998; Wheeland 1993). However, the impact of involving management consultants in public strategic management processes on proximate outcomes such as organizational performance is to this date almost unknown.

EXPLORING LINK 4, 5 AND 6: THE IMPACT OF PRACTICES-PRACTITIONERS-PRAXIS DURING PLAN FORMULATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Link 4: the relationship between characteristics of plan formulation processes and public strategic management outcomes

Most of the analyzed articles focus predominantly on the link between the theoretical element strategic plan formulation and proximate (22 articles) and distal outcomes (19 articles). As a result, a wide range of empirical findings concerning the impact of practitioners-practices-praxis during strategic plan formulation on distal and proximate outcomes is observed.

The first observation concerns the practice of the formality of the process (i.e. process elements) and its impact on proximate and distal outcomes. In essence, rational or synoptic planning theory states that a formal and comprehensive process for defining a strategic plan is beneficial for the organization as rational decision-making is encouraged by means of analytical practices (i.e. process elements) which take into account the environment of the organization (Andrews et al. 2009; Hendrick 2003). However, the empirical evidence supporting this plea for higher formality is limited. Some evidence (mostly linked to proximate outcomes) is identified for the process elements defining and communicating upfront strategic planning guidelines (Baker 1992; Kemp et al. 1993; Ugboro and al. 2011), performing a feasibility assessment of proposed strategies (Ingman et al. 2002; Poister and Streib 2005) and identifying and defining performance measures (Kelman and Myers 2011; Poister 2005; Poister et al. 2013; Poister and Van Slyke 2002). Conflictingly, other process elements (e.g. defining a mission, a vision, internal analysis, external analysis) are also investigated but with limited or conflicting results (e.g. Poister and Streib 2005; Ugboro et al. 2011).

Aside from the formality of the process, the degree of (internal and external) participation during strategic plan formulation is also frequently documented. In essence, there are two theories concerning stakeholder involvement: (1) integrative stakeholder participation theory (i.e. include a broad range of internal and external stakeholders and take decisions by bargaining and agreement) and (2) exclusionary stakeholder participation theory (i.e. fewer people are involved in the process, decision-making is predominantly executed by top management with little consultation) (Hendrick 2003). In the case of public strategic management processes, the available empirical evidence strongly supports the integrative stakeholder participation theory. In our analysis, we identify about 15 empirical articles addressing the impact of internal and external participation, of which almost all identify positive proximate (e.g. shared understanding and commitment) and distal (e.g. realized strategy) outcomes of including internal (e.g. department heads and other senior managers) and external (e.g. labor unions) stakeholders during strategic plan formulation (e.g. Franklin 2001; Kissler et al.1998; Poister and Streib 2005; Spee and Jarzabkowski 2011).

The second observation concerns the relationship between the practitioners involved in strategic plan formulation and proximate and distal outcomes. Five specific categories relevant to practitioners are positively linked to a range of both distal and proximate outcomes (George and Desmidt 2013): top/middle manager roles (e.g. top & middle management support, presence of process champion), attitudes toward the planning process (e.g. perceived simplicity, perceived fairness), attitudes during the planning process (e.g. perceived conflict, perceived participation) and planning team qualities (e.g. experience, external orientation). As opposed to the conflicting results of the practices, the above-mentioned categories consist of limited, but almost all positive results on proximate (e.g. strategic planning effectiveness) and distal outcomes (e.g. realized strategy), with the strongest empirical evidence for the subcategory top management support & involvement (e.g. Korosec 2006; Spee and Jarzabkowski 2011). Subsequently, this seems to support pleas from Ackermann and Eden (2011), Eden (1992) and Vaara and Whittington (2012) to analyze strategy making not solely from an analytical perspective, but also as a social process including interactions between individuals which impacts the subsequent outcomes of strategy activities.

Third, the least explored category of the S-as-P paradigm within strategic plan formulation is the praxis of strategy-making (i.e. analytical tools or boundary objects such as strategic plans), despite its relevance for generating consensus, shared understanding and commitment (Bryson et al. 2009). A clear example of the relevance of strategy praxis is offered by Vaara et al. (2010) who discover that content elements of the strategic plan have an impact on specific outcomes. For instance, by emphasizing the relevance of strategy work and its authoritative importance, the subsequent strategy is highly prioritized as the instrument for decision-making and subsequent execution (proximate outcome) (Vaara et al. 2010). Another important element within the praxis of strategy making is analytical tools (e.g. SWOT-analysis, Five Forces-model). Only one such a tool is specifically indicated as a success factor for achieving desired proximate outcomes of strategic plan formulation: benchmarking (Kissler et al. 1998).

Link 5: the relationship between characteristics of plan implementation processes and public strategic management outcomes

Although more limited than the evidence concerning plan formulation processes, some authors investigate the relationship between plan implementation and proximate (5 articles) or distal (7 articles) outcomes.

First, concerning the practices of strategic plan implementation: two process elements are cited as generating positive proximate or distal outcomes. The first element is formally assuring that all operations, management and decision-making are in line with the strategic plan. Subsequently, the plan moves from a static, on the shelf role, to becoming an instrument which improves managerial decision making and coordination of operational activities (proximate outcomes) (Korosec 2006; Poister 2005; Ugboro et al. 2011). In line with this finding, Poister and Streib (2005) also recommend to derive the objectives of department heads and other managers directly from the overall strategic plan, thus again enhancing coordination and decision making (proximate outcomes), and also organizational performance (distal outcome). A second process element is linked to budgetary provisions: targeting and linking (new) resources in the budget specifically to the achievement of the strategy. This ensures that the necessary resources are allocated to strategic initiatives, maximizing process effectiveness (proximate outcome) and strategy realization (distal outcome) (Poister and Streib 2005; Poister and Van Slyke 2002).

Second, when addressing the practitioners of strategic plan implementation, two interesting findings are observed. The first finding concerns the middle/top manager roles during plan implementation: formally (and informally) appointing ownership of strategic plan elements to specific middle or top managers leads to both increased commitment and understanding (proximate outcome) and organizational performance (distal outcome) (Poister 2005; Poister and Van Slyke 2002; Walker and Boyne 2006). A second finding concerns the relationship with external stakeholders during implementation, where for example Blair (2004) uncovers the importance of continuously receiving and subsequently maintaining support from external stakeholders throughout the implementation phase in order to enhance stakeholder relations (distal outcome).

Third, looking at the praxis of strategic plan implementation, some findings are identified concerning material and analytical tools. For example, operationalizing the actual strategic plan into department level strategic plans and project level action plans enhances implementation success of strategic initiatives (distal outcome) and coordination between departments and top management (proximate outcome) (Poister 2005; Poister and Van Slyke 2002). Additionally, producing and subsequently implementing a management information system in order to track progress on targets is likely to lead to high performance (distal outcome) (Walker and Boyne 2006).

Link 6: the relationship between characteristics of plan evaluation processes and public strategic management outcomes

Link 6 is least investigated by the identified articles, with 4 articles observing proximate outcomes and 5 articles observing distal outcomes. The most cited practice for achieving positive distal and proximate outcomes via strategic plan evaluation processes is the process element of establishing some form of formal monitoring for revisiting the strategic plan. Such a monitoring process takes into account both internal and external data and enables the organization to adequately react to the changes in the environment which perhaps require updates of the strategic plan (e.g. Baker 1992; Hendrick 2003; Poister and Streib 2005). The success of such a monitoring process is of course contingent upon the availability of data, which should be taken into account when designing the monitoring process (Boyne et al., 2002). Another process element

that leads to positive proximate and distal outcomes is ensuring that the annual evaluations of senior and middle management are articulated through their achievement of or added value on strategic objectives (Poister and Streib 2005). Finally, again identified as a process element that generates positive proximate and distal outcomes is the public and internal communication of (the achievement on) performance measures, thus ensuring the general public and internal organization of the accountability and transparency of the organization (Poister and Streib 2005; Poister and Van Slyke 2002).

2.5. Conclusion and avenues for future research

In this research paper we have (1) generated preliminary insight into the nature of public strategic management processes by devising a holistic conceptual framework, (2) offered an overview of the empirical academic articles addressing parts of this framework, and (3) explored the available empirical findings concerning the identified relationships in the devised model. Conclusively, executing these three objectives has led to some interesting observations and future research avenues structured around following pillars: a contingency perspective on public strategic management and New Institutional Theory and S-as-P as relevant theoretical frameworks.

A CONTINGENCY PERSPECTIVE ON PUBLIC STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

As indicated in link 1, Contingency Theory cannot be neglected when investigating characteristics and outcomes of public strategic management. This leads to limitations when generalizing the findings of the identified 42 empirical articles. They, almost unilaterally, focus on public organizations (quite frequently in the context of local authorities) in the US and the UK. Subsequently, in order to answer the call for identifying which characteristic of public strategic management works and in which situation, empirical articles (especially large-n and multi case studies) addressing different country and government contexts need to find their way to mainstream (public) management journals (Bryson et al. 2010; Poister et al. 2010). Additionally, context is not limited to country and level of government, organizational culture for instance is a context determinant that has had an impact on characteristics and outcomes of public management practices (e.g. Korosec 2006; Wynen and Verhoest 2013) and could have an interesting impact on public strategic management as well.

NEW INSTITUTIONAL THEORY AND S-AS-P AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Although offering valuable insights, most empirical articles identified in this paper did not employ a theoretical paradigm or framework as foundation for their inquiry. This observation is shared by Wolf and Floyd (2013) in their review of private sector literature on strategic planning processes. As a result, we propose two paradigms which could offer valuable insights into determinants, characteristics and outcomes of public strategic management processes: New Institutional Theory and S-as-P.

New Institutional Theory as a relevant future research avenue

The empirical findings addressing institutional pressures are mostly limited to US samples and, for example in the relationship between management consultants and strategic management outcomes, are predominantly drawn from case studies. Subsequently, further inquire into the institutional pressures affecting strategic management processes could lead to interesting new insights (Wolf and Floyd 2013). For example, future research efforts could link consultancy involvement (as part of mimetic pressures) to the adoption of specific characteristics (e.g. analytical tools such as benchmarking, balanced scorecard or attitudes such as consensus, conflict) of strategic management processes or, in a next stage, even directly to the outcomes of these processes. Another institutional influence that is given little to almost no attention are normative pressures. For example, despite the often mandated role of specific public managers (e.g. the Flemish decree for local authorities (Gemeentedecreet 2005) appoints the city manager as responsible for the delivery of the strategic plan, supported by the top management team), little inquiry is made into the effect of the “professionalization” of public managers, through their formal education and training, on characteristics and outcomes of public strategic management (Jarzabkowski 2010).

Strategy-as-Practice as a relevant future research avenue

The S-as-P paradigm aspires to close the gap between academic research and the world of practitioners by focusing on the practitioners-practices-praxis of strategic management (Vaara and Whittington 2012). This aspiration is driven by the fact that strategy work (i.e. strategizing) is significantly impacted by organizational and other practices, insights into these practices is thus crucial to understand outcomes of strategy-making (Vaara and Whittington 2012). Subsequently, by categorizing the empirical findings within

a S-as-P framework, we uncovered what we see as a productive research avenue in line with contemporary research evolutions without losing focus on the practical reality of public strategy-making (Wolf and Floyd 2013).

Perhaps the most relevant general observation is that there is only limited focus on the impact of the praxis of strategy-making (i.e. planning documents, analytical tools), mostly addressing such instruments as the strategic plan, subsequent department plans, management information systems and benchmarking. However, a wide variety of analytical and creative instruments (e.g. creativity workshops, strategic off-sites, SWOT-analysis, strategy maps) define the praxis of strategy making and subsequently merit further investigation (Bryson et al. 2009; Wolf and Floyd 2013). These instruments or objects are labeled “boundary objects” by Bryson (2010) and perform a crucial role in generating consensus and a shared meaning between strategy practitioners (Bryson et al. 2009). Subsequently, exactly these “social and attitudinal” outcomes of strategy-making (e.g. consensus, shared understanding, commitment) have been identified as valuable assets in achieving strategy success and subsequent organizational performance (Ackermann and Eden 2011; Dewettinck and van Ameijde 2011). Interestingly enough, an opportunity lies in coupling New Institutional Theory to this call for more knowledge on strategy praxis, for instance by linking consultancy involvement and/or management education to the application (and perceived effectiveness) of strategy tools (e.g. Balanced Scorecard, Five Forces) (Wolf and Floyd 2013).

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CHAPTER 3: STRATEGIC-DECISION QUALITY IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: AN INFORMATION-PROCESSING PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT - This study draws on information processing theory to investigate predictors of strategic-decision quality in public organizations. Information processing theory argues that (a) rational planning practices contribute to strategic-decision quality by injecting information into decision-making and (b) decision-makers contribute to strategic-decision quality by exchanging information during decision-making. These assumptions are tested upon fifty-five Flemish pupil guidance centers. Rational planning practices are operationalized as strategic planning, performance measurement and performance management. Information exchange by decision-makers during decision-making is operationalized as procedural justice of the decision-making process. Results suggest that procedural justice, strategic planning and performance management contribute to strategic-decision quality while performance measurement does not.

3.1. Introduction

In the slipstream of new public management, rational planning has conquered the public sector by storm (Boyne, 2001; Bryson, 2010). Rational planning is a theoretical framework of strategic management that centers on a rational approach to strategy formulation through strategic planning and strategy implementation through performance measurement and performance management (Andrews, Boyne, Law, & Walker, 2009b; Poister, Pitts, & Edwards, 2010). Rational planning has been the subject of several legislative provisions worldwide such as Best Value in the UK and the Government Performance and Results Act in the US (Bovaird, 2008; Boyne, Gould-Williams, Law, & Walker, 2004; Poister & Streib, 2005). Key to rational planning's popularity is the assumption that it contributes to strategic-decision quality in the public sector by offering a counterweight to political or intuitive decision-making (Boyne, 2001; Walker, Andrews, Boyne, Meier, & O'Toole, 2010). From an information processing perspective, this assumption is, at least theoretically, valid (Elbanna, 2006; Rogers, Miller, & Judge, 1999). Rational planning practices can inject information into decision-making processes by offering, for instance, focus on strategic goals, insights into the organizational environment, and insights into performance information (e.g. Boyne et al., 2004; Poister, 2005; Taylor, 2011).

Although these theoretical arguments prompt the assumption that rational planning practices can be viewed as significant predictors of strategic-decision quality in public organizations, the validity of this assumption is debated. First, while several scholars have provided arguments for the effectiveness of rational planning practices in public organizations (e.g. Bryson, 2011; Joyce, 2014), there has been an equal amount of criticism geared towards its inappropriateness for the public sector (Ugboro, Obeng, & Spann, 2011). For instance, Bovaird (2008) and Radin (2006) indicated that, due to their mechanistic nature, rational planning practices are inapplicable in the complex, adaptive context of public organizations. Additionally, three recent reviews on the topic acknowledged that the debate on rational planning's effectiveness in public organizations is far from over due to the lack of conclusive and generalizable evidence (Bryson, Berry, & Yang, 2010; George & Desmidt, 2014; Poister et al., 2010). Second, the, albeit limited, empirical evidence on rational planning's effectiveness in public organizations has, so far, centered

on performance-related outcomes (e.g. Andrews, Boyne, Law, & Walker, 2009a; Jung & Lee, 2013), while empirical studies focusing on the output of rational planning practices (e.g. strategic-decision quality) are, to our knowledge, lacking (Bryson, Crosby, & Bryson, 2009; Poister et al., 2010). Third, research on rational planning practices in public organizations has typically not included variables that measure the behavior of decision-makers within strategic decision-making processes (Bryson et al., 2009; George & Desmidt, 2014). However, if we want to assess the main effect of rational planning practices on strategic-decision quality, literature on strategic decision-making processes argues that we cannot disregard the amount of variance in strategic-decision quality already explained by the behavior of decision-makers (e.g. Olson, Parayitam, & Bao, 2007; Parayitam & Dooley, 2009). Conclusively, as a result of these three issues the assumed contribution of rational planning practices to strategic-decision quality in public organizations is a 'shot in the dark' (Walker & Boyne, 2006, 375).

Our study contributes to the debate on rational planning's effectiveness in public organizations by addressing the above-mentioned three issues. First, we focus on strategic-decision quality (i.e. dependent variable) as key output of rational planning practices in public organizations. We thus offer knowledge on the process output of rational planning, which is argued to precede process outcomes such as organizational performance (Kellermanns, Walter, Floyd, Lechner, & Shaw, 2011; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Strategic-decision quality is particularly useful process output because it focuses on a specific set of strategic decisions as units of analysis (Elbanna, 2006) and reflects how decision-makers feel about 'the overall quality' of strategic decisions, 'the range of relevant issues' addressed by strategic decisions and 'the depth' of strategic decisions (Olson et al., 2007, 207).

Second, we draw on information processing theory, a popular theoretical framework in the strategic decision-making literature, to hypothesize predictors of strategic-decision quality (i.e. independent variables) in public organizations. Information processing theory typically views public organizations as systems that continuously need to collect and exchange information (Daft, Bettenhausen, & Tyler, 1993). Specifically applied to decision-making, decision-makers need to collect and exchange information in order to make informed and qualitative decisions (Olson et al., 2007). We hypothesize that rational planning practices typically inject information relevant to decision-making into the decision-making process, thus

improving strategic-decision quality (Rogers et al., 1999). Additionally, we hypothesize that strategic-decision quality is also impacted by the extent to which decision-makers exchange information during decision-making by being allowed to participate in decision-making, exercise their voice during decision-making and appeal decisions (Colquitt, 2001; Rubin, 2009). These decision-making process characteristics are labeled by Kim and Mauborgne (1993,1995) as procedural justice of the decision-making process. By including procedural justice of the decision-making process as a predictor of strategic-decision quality, we complement previous research on rational planning because we also attribute attention to behavior during decision-making as another important indicator of planning process output such as strategic-decision quality (Bryson et al., 2009; George & Desmidt, 2014).

Third, we include three rational planning practices (i.e. strategic planning, performance measurement, performance management) that are high on the agenda of public sector reforms and public management scholars (Boyne, 2001; Boyne et al., 2004; Poister et al., 2010). The impact of these practices is tested upon fifty-five public human services organizations, namely Flemish pupil guidance centers. As such, our study answers the call for more contingency-based planning research (Bryson et al., 2010; Walker & Andrews, 2015) by examining rational planning's effectiveness in an empirical setting different from local government or transport departments, and acknowledges the multidimensional nature of rational planning (Boyne, 2001; Poister et al., 2010) by including three separate rational planning practices instead of using a single planning construct.

In what follows, we discuss our theoretical framework and formulate hypotheses. Next, the methods are defined. This includes units of analysis, data, common method bias, variables, controls and analysis. Based on a multiple regression model, the statistical results of our study are presented. We conclude by discussing the implications and limitations of our study. Our findings support information processing theory but also offer some nuance. In our model, which controls for resource scarcity, tenure and team size, the independent variables strategic planning, performance management and procedural justice are positively related to strategic-decision quality.

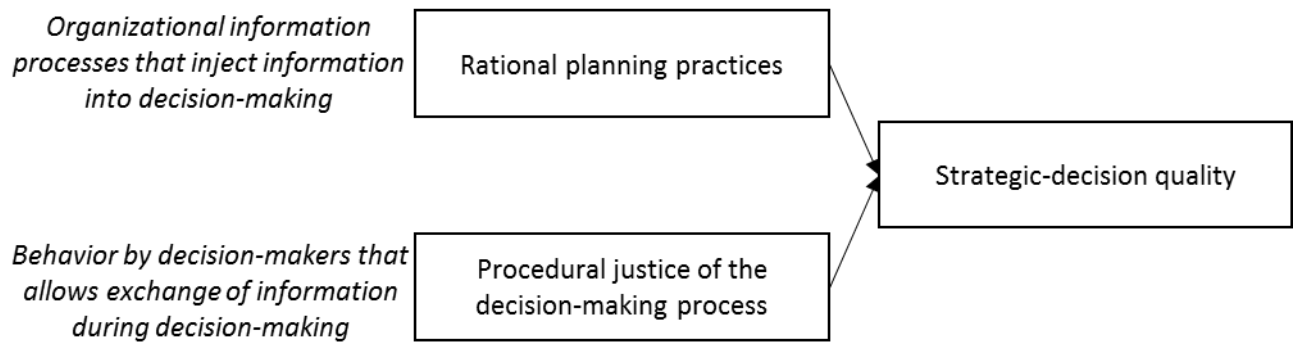
3.2. Theory and hypotheses

Over the past decade, a limited number of empirical studies tested the effectiveness of rational planning in the public sector (e.g. Boyne & Gould-Williams, 2003; Jung & Lee, 2013). These studies have provided evidence-based insights on rational planning and their value cannot be underestimated. Interestingly enough, these studies have almost unilaterally focused on measures of organizational performance to assess rational planning's effectiveness. While some studies found a positive relationship (e.g. Poister, Pasha, & Edwards, 2013; Walker et al., 2010), others resulted in statistically non-significant direct effects (e.g. Andrews et al., 2009a; Andrews, Boyne, Law, & Walker, 2011). Few studies have explicitly focused on strategic-decision quality as a measure of rational planning's effectiveness, despite the fact that strategic-decision quality is an often-cited argument as to why rational planning would 'work' in public organizations (Boyne, 2001; Walker et al., 2010). We address this research gap and offer evidence for the relation between rational planning practices and strategic-decision quality in public organizations based on information processing theory.

Information processing theory argues that the quality of strategic decisions is inherent to the information that is collected and exchanged during decision-making (Daft et al., 1993). While information collection implies the development and involvement of some form of organizational system or process that injects information into decision-making, information exchange implies some form of behavior by decision-makers that allows individuals to exchange information during decision-making (Kim & Mauborgne, 1995; Rogers et al., 1999). Hence, we include measures of organizational information processes (i.e. rational planning practices) as well as behavior by decision-makers during decision-making (i.e. procedural justice of the decision-making process) as predictors of strategic-decision quality in our model. First, in support of rational planning's information processing capabilities, Rogers et al. (1999, 568) argue that through rational planning practices 'information is collected and injected into the strategic decision-making process'. Second, in support of procedural justice's information processing capabilities, Kim and Mauborgne (1995, 46) argue that 'the quality of strategy content is a function of the information processing capability inherent in the procedural justice model of strategic decision making'. In the remainder of this section, we further

explain the rationale underlying our model and develop hypotheses concerning the relationships between rational planning practices, procedural justice of the decision-making process and strategic-decision quality (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Predictors of strategic-decision quality in public organizations



RATIONAL PLANNING PRACTICES

Although some ambiguity and semantic pitfalls remain on what exactly constitute rational planning practices, scholars distinguish two different planning phases: a formulation phase and an implementation phase (Andrews et al., 2009b). The formulation phase typically includes strategic planning (Poister et al., 2013), while the implementation phase typically includes performance measurement (Poister et al., 2013) and performance management (Poister & Streib, 2005).

Our first hypothesis concerns strategic planning's contribution to strategic-decision quality. Strategic planning is a systematic and stepwise process that focuses on formulating a strategic plan (i.e. strategy formulation) in a rational and analytical manner (Bryson, 2010; Poister et al., 2013; Ugboro et al., 2011). Drawing on information processing theory, we argue that the resulting formal strategic plan is an important source of information for decision-making because it typically offers insights into the strategic course and priorities of the organization as well as illustrating key organizational information such as the organizational strengths and weaknesses (Poister et al., 2013; Vaara, Sorsa, & Pälli, 2010). Hence, strategic decisions are taken based on the information gathered by the strategic planning process and presented in the strategic plan (Rogers et al., 1999; Ugboro et al., 2011).

The cited importance of strategic planning's informative role in decision-making is also confirmed by several studies in public administration. For instance, Baker (1992) argues that the strategic plan offers a clear rationale for decision-making within a U.S. federal agency. Ingman, Kersten, and Brymer (2002) identify strategic plans as essential tools for prioritization and for enhanced decision-making. Poister and Streib (1989) illustrate that strategic planning can indeed enhance managerial decision-making in US municipalities. A finding that is confirmed by Berry and Wechsler (1995) who argue that 82 per cent of US state agency directors claim that the strategic plan is an important instrument that assists in decision-making. Finally, Poister (2005, 1053) also elaborates on the informative role of strategic planning by indicating that strategic plans can 'provide overall direction for major decisions throughout the organization on an ongoing basis'. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H1: Strategic planning is positively related to strategic-decision quality.

Our second hypothesis concerns performance measurement's contribution to strategic-decision quality. Performance measurement is a monitoring instrument that encompasses the identification of quantitative performance measures linked to the strategic plan and strategic goals, setting targets for these performance measures, monitoring the achievement of those targets and using performance information to benchmark the organization (Poister et al., 2013). Hence, performance measurement offers information in the form of quantitative data that can be used during decision-making efforts in order to again result in informed strategic decisions (Moynihan & Pandey, 2010). Performance measurement systems thus 'rest on the assumption that when performance information is generated, managers will use it to make better decisions' (Hvidman & Andersen, 2014, 38). A perspective that is shared by Askim, Johnsen, and Christophersen (2008) who find that public organizations that engage specifically in benchmarking performance measures also incorporate this information in their strategic decisions.

The link between performance measurement and decision-making is also illustrated by Askim (2009) who argues that experienced councilors search for performance information when they are confronted with a decision dilemma and are uncertain on the decision to take. Moreover, Taylor (2011) recommends the usage of performance information to enhance decision-making processes by both public agencies and

accountability authorities. Conclusively, we hypothesize that performance measurement is a decision-making instrument that can provide focus to decision-makers, encourage learning during decision-making and provide performance data over time, which in turn all contribute to the quality of strategic decisions (Kelman & Myers, 2011; Poister & Streib, 2005).

H2: Performance measurement is positively related to strategic-decision quality.

Our third hypothesis concerns performance management's contribution to strategic-decision quality. Performance management in our model centers around the links between the strategic plan, the objectives of key individuals and the evaluation of said individuals by central stakeholders (Poister & Streib, 2005). This specific approach to strategy-implementation as defined by Poister and Streib (2005) does not necessarily involve the 'hard' quantification of targets but rather focuses on aligning the strategic plan and strategic goals of the organization with the interests of key individuals. By linking strategic plans and individual objectives, performance management facilitates continuous communication of the importance of and the commitment towards achieving strategic goals (Poister & Van Slyke, 2002). This, in turn, encourages decision-makers to focus during decision-making because strategic decisions will be taken in order to achieve successful realization of both strategic and personal-level goals (Poister, 2005; Poister & Van Slyke, 2002). Or, in the words of Poister (2010, S252) 'without such linkages, strategic planning is much less effective in driving decisions and actions in an agency and moving purposefully into the future'.

Performance management also injects information into decision-making in the form of formalizing and managing stakeholder expectations (Brignall & Modell, 2000; Poister & Streib, 2005). Because public organizations are typically characterized by 'complex interrelationships between multiple stakeholders and the intensely political nature of decision-making', performance management offers a framework for identifying and managing the expectations of key stakeholders and thus ensuring that strategic decisions are focused on satisfying those expectations (Brignall & Modell, 2000, 300). We hypothesize that performance management facilitates information gathering in decision-making and contributes to strategic-decision quality, by encouraging focus on strategic goals through individual-level goals and incorporating stakeholder expectations.

H3: Performance management is positively related to strategic-decision quality.

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Apart from information collection through rational planning practices, information processing theory also argues that decision-makers need to exchange information in order to make informed and qualitative strategic decisions because each individual holds a specific piece of the decision-making puzzle (Daft et al., 1993; Olson et al., 2007). In order to facilitate said information exchange, decision-makers need to be encouraged to participate in decision-making through the procedures used for decision-making and through the interpersonal treatment within the decision-making group (Kim & Mauborgne, 1993; Korsgaard, Schweiger, & Sapienza, 1995). Precisely those two elements have been attributed to the concept of perceived procedural justice (Colquitt, 2001; Rubin, 2009).

Our fourth hypothesis concerns procedural justice's contribution to strategic-decision quality. While the semantic term in itself might imply that procedural justice limits itself to measures of 'fairness', it is actually a multidimensional measure of information exchange which assesses 'the degree to which procedures provide individuals the opportunity to communicate their views, evidence, or arguments', 'the degree to which individuals can regulate the opportunities available to exercise voice' and 'the degree to which opportunities exist to either appeal decisions or change the ground rules' (Rubin, 2009, 127).

This assumed positive impact of procedural justice on decision-making quality is not just theoretically interesting, it has also been empirically validated. For instance, Korsgaard et al. (1995) find that procedural justice of the decision-making process positively impacts decision-makers' perceptions of strategic decisions. A finding that is shared by Kim and Mauborgne (1995) who claim that procedurally just decision-making processes elicit stronger information processing capabilities and contribute to the effectiveness of strategic decisions. In two earlier studies by the same authors (Kim & Mauborgne, 1991, 1993), a positive contribution of procedural justice to decision-making (i.e. compliance and satisfaction with strategic decisions) is also presented. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H4: Procedural justice of the decision-making process is positively related to strategic-decision quality.

3.3. Methods

UNITS OF ANALYSIS

Our units of analysis are pupil guidance centers in Flanders. We focus on Flanders, the northern, Dutch speaking part of Belgium, because education in Belgium is a regional responsibility. In order to ensure a homogeneous research setting that allows us to control for a variety of external contingencies (e.g. economic context, political context, legislative context) (Andrews et al., 2009a), we decided to focus only on Flemish pupil guidance centers. There are seventy-two Flemish pupil guidance centers spread geographically throughout Flanders. These centers are public human services organizations, which perform a supportive role in the Flemish education system. The central mission of these centers is to support pupils, their parents, teachers and school principals in all Dutch-speaking schools within their jurisdiction in order to enhance the wellbeing of said pupils. As such, the key focus of the centers lies on preventive healthcare, the educational career and psychological and social functioning of pupils. The workforce of each center typically includes physicians, psychologists and social workers. Each center is headed by a director who is supported by department heads, quality managers and/or policy advisors.

DATA

A four-step data-gathering procedure was executed based on the recommendations of Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson (2012). First, we developed a cross-sectional electronic survey. This survey includes only previously published measures to ensure concurrent validity and was pretested by both a practitioner and academic committee in order to maximize face validity (Andrews et al., 2009a). One item of the performance measurement-scale and two items of the performance management-scale were dropped as a result of the pretesting phase because these were deemed inapplicable. Second, in order to ensure the commitment of pupil guidance centers to participate in our survey we contacted the central authorities that offer training and advice to the centers. These authorities provided full cooperation and stimulated centers to participate in our study. Third, in order to identify expert informants, we contacted the directors of the seventy-two Flemish pupil guidance centers by phone, asked them to participate in the study and

provide the details of those individuals closely involved in strategic decision-making within their organization. Fourth, the cross-sectional electronic survey was sent to all identified expert informants (i.e. directors and other decision-makers). To ensure a high response rate as well as qualitative responses, we offered incentives to all respondents in the form of a research report and guaranteed anonymity. The throughput time between the initial distribution of the survey and the final survey response was about one month (i.e. late March 2014 to late April 2014) (Lee et al., 2012).

In order to be included in our final data set, we required at least two respondents per organization (Enticott, Boyne, & Walker, 2009). Hence, we adopted a multi-informant approach. The rationale for this approach lies in the fact that all of our variables are measured at the organizational level. If we would employ a single informant approach, we might risk that ‘what is supposedly a measure of a whole organization may actually represent only a single level or subunit’ (Enticott et al., 2009, 230). In fifty-five of the seventy-two centers, we gathered survey data from at least two respondents (i.e. a 76,39 per cent response rate). On average, we received 3,40 respondents per organization with a range of 2 – 8 respondents. In order to identify a score that is representative for the organization, we aggregated the responses of the two or more informants within a pupil guidance center and calculated the average score. For instance, if we have two responses (e.g. one from a director and one from a policy advisor), the mean of those two responses was used. Issues with sample representativeness and probability sampling methods were limited in our data. Our population equaled our sample frame and more than three quarters of that population participated. In order to address nonresponse bias, we compared the answers of early and late respondents to our survey via time-trend extrapolation (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). We found no significant differences (Lee et al., 2012).

COMMON METHOD BIAS

Because our research design utilizes the same source for measuring the dependent and independent variables (i.e. a cross-sectional survey), common method bias could be a concern. In support of our choice to use a survey, Favero and Bullock (2014) argue that common method bias is of particular concern in studies that measure organizational characteristics, such as organizational performance, as dependent

variable through perceptual survey items. Such perceptual measurements often result in skewed data, where respondents for instance overestimate the performance of their organization (Brewer, 2006; Meier & O'Toole, 2013). In contrast, when perceptual items are used to measure attitudes, interpretations of events or behavioral intentions (e.g. perceived strategic-decision quality), common method bias might be less of a concern (Favero & Bullock, 2014; Meier & O'Toole, 2013). Nevertheless, we tried to minimize issues of common method bias through our survey design and by identifying its impact through a statistical test (Jakobsen & Jensen, 2014).

First, our survey design followed recommendations of MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012). Some of these recommendations were already discussed in the previous section (e.g. pretesting survey, identifying expert informants, offering incentives, gaining support from central authorities & directors). Response options were also labelled in the survey and highlights were used to indicate different items. In order to emphasize the importance and accuracy of responses, we explained the central objectives of the survey in the introduction mail and we offered full anonymity. The dependent and independent variables were separated in the survey by placing them on different pages, which creates a time lag between the respondent's answers (Jakobsen & Jensen, 2014; MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Second, we identified the impact of common method bias via the statistical test developed by Harman (1976). We executed a one-factor test. The items in the survey that measure strategic-decision quality, strategic planning, performance measurement, performance management and procedural justice were incorporated in an unrotated factor analysis. Five different factors were identified, items were not linked to one factor. None of the identified factors explained a large percentage of variance, with the biggest factor explaining about 38 per cent of variance. Conclusively, based on (a) the procedural measures that were included in our survey design and (b) the lack of one dominant factor or one highly explanatory factor emerging from our unrotated factor analysis, we can conclude that common method bias is not likely to be problematic in our study.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

We measured strategic-decision quality with the six items ($\alpha = .946$) presented by Olson et al. (2007) (see Table 2 for full items). In order to identify a set of relevant strategic decisions, we followed the same approach as Carmeli, Tishler, and Edmondson (2012) and asked decision-makers to focus on the most recent strategic decisions. More specifically, they were asked to focus on the decisions in 2013 that involved the entire decision-making team of the center and that were specifically linked to their 2009 – 2013 policy cycle. Similar to previous studies, strategic-decision quality in our analysis measures perceptions of decision-makers concerning the quality of strategic decisions (e.g. Amason, 1996; Carmeli et al., 2012; Olson et al., 2007). Such a measurement approach is assumed to provide reliable results in the absence of more objective measures (Dess & Robinson, 1984). The strategic-decision quality variable demonstrates acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha > .700$) and factor loadings of the items are sufficient (i.e. $> .500$) (Hair, Black, & Babin, 2010).

Table 2: Survey items and factor loadings of strategic-decision quality variable

Survey items	Factor 1
Strategic-decision quality ($\alpha = .946$) (7-point Likert-scale, 1 = very bad, 7 = very good)	
The strategic decisions have had a ... effect on the center.	.908
Relative to what we expected, the results of the strategic decisions have been844
Overall, we feel that the strategic decisions were929
The degree to which our strategic decisions covered the maximum range of relevant issues was894
The degree to which our strategic decisions were well structured and reflective of interrelationships and intra-relationships among the relevant issues was922
The degree to which our strategic decisions were expressed in depth was839
Eigenvalue/cumulative variance	4.752/79.199

Note: Sample size = 55

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

First, the measures used for the rational planning practices are as follows (see Table 3 for full items): strategic planning was measured by four items ($\alpha = .727$) developed by Poister et al. (2013). Performance measurement was also measured by four items ($\alpha = .790$) developed by Poister et al. (2013). Performance management was measured by four items ($\alpha = .612$) developed by Poister and Streib (2005). Respondents were asked to focus on their center's rational planning practices during the 2009 – 2013 policy cycle. Strategic planning and performance measurement demonstrate acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha > .700$). Performance management offers satisfactory internal consistency taking into account that this is a newer scale with few items ($\alpha > .600$) (Hair et al., 2010). Factor loadings of the items are sufficient (i.e. $> .500$) (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 3: Survey items and factor loadings of rational planning variables

Survey items	Factor 1
Strategic planning ($\alpha = .727$) (7-point Likert-scale, 1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)	
When we formulate strategy, we use a systematic planning process.	.870
We have completed a formal strategic plan or plan update periodically.	.796
We have conducted situational analyses of our strengths and weaknesses.	.646
We have established strategic goals and have used them to drive decisions and actions throughout the center.	.677
Eigenvalue/cumulative variance	2.266/56.653
Performance measurement ($\alpha = .790$) (7-point Likert-scale, 1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)	
We have used performance measures to track the accomplishments of strategic goals and objectives.	.852
We have used performance measures to track performance over time.	.864
We have set clear numerical targets and then actively monitored and managed performance in order to achieve those targets.	.794
We have used measures to compare performance between our departments.	.604
Eigenvalue/cumulative variance	2.469/61.713
Performance management ($\alpha = .612$) (7-point Likert-scale, 1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)	
Objectives established for management team members come from the overall strategy.	.714
Central authority holds the director responsible for implementing the strategy.	.752
Evaluation of the director is based on accomplishment of the strategic goals and objectives.	.554
Our director tries to keep the stakeholders focused on the strategic goals and objectives.	.696
Eigenvalue/cumulative variance	1.868/46.690

Note: Sample size = 55

Second, procedural justice of the decision-making process was measured by the seven items ($\alpha = .905$) developed by Colquitt (2001) (see Table 4 for full items). The items were adapted to the specific context. More specifically, respondents were asked to assess the decision-making processes underlying the decisions in 2013 that involved the entire decision-making team of the center and that were specifically linked to their 2009 – 2013 policy cycle. The procedural justice variable demonstrates acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha > .700$) and factor loadings of the items are sufficient (i.e. $> .500$) (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 4: Survey items and factor loadings of procedural justice variable

Survey items	Factor 1
Procedural justice of the decision-making process ($\alpha = .905$) (7-point Likert-scale, 1 = to a very small extent, 7 = to a very large extent)	
Have you been able to express your views and feelings during decision-making processes?	.794
Have you had influence over the strategic decisions arrived at by decision-making processes?	.866
Have decision-making processes been applied consistently?	.796
Have decision-making processes been free of bias?	.863
Have decision-making processes been based on accurate information?	.777
Have you been able to appeal the strategic decisions arrived at by decision-making processes?	.725
Have decision-making processes upheld ethical and moral standards?	.762
Eigenvalue/cumulative variance	4.469/63.838

Note: Sample size = 55

CONTROLS

We include three control variables that are assumed to impact strategic-decision quality. First, we include the average tenure of decision-makers within the center. Second, we include the number of decision-makers identified by the director (i.e. team size). Third, we include resource scarcity of the center. We measured resource scarcity as a ratio-variable, namely the number of schools serviced by the center divided by the number of fulltime equivalent units employed by the center. These controls are recommended by Olson et al. (2007) when investigating predictors of strategic-decision quality.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics and zero order correlations

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Strategic-decision quality	5.06	0.68	1.000							
2 Strategic planning	5.42	0.67	.724**	1.000						
3 Performance measurement	3.87	0.82	.288*	.348**	1.000					
4 Performance management	4.20	0.54	.646**	.599**	.425**	1.000				
5 Procedural justice	5.18	0.55	.746**	.713**	.353**	.609**	1.000			
6 Tenure	15.10	5.88	.059	0.027	-.294*	-.224	.002	1.000		
7 Team size	4.05	1.56	.123	.148	-.186	-.052	.061	.191	1.000	
8 Resource scarcity	1.35	0.37	.159	.158	.030	.007	.129	.039	.172	1.000

* = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$

Note: Sample size = 55.

ANALYSIS

In order to test the hypotheses, this study utilizes multiple regression modelling. However, Table 5 indicates high correlations between the variables. We need to ensure that multicollinearity is not an issue in our model before conducting the regression analysis. We calculate the variance inflation factor (VIF) to assess potential issues with multicollinearity. All VIF-values are below 2.5 indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue. We now continue to our statistical results.

3.4. Statistical results

Table 6: Regression results

Independent variable	Coef. (s.e.)
Constant	-.692 (.622)
<i>Rational planning practices</i>	
Strategic planning	.286* (.131)
Performance measurement	-.024 (.081)
Performance management	.364* (.149)
<i>Procedural justice of the decision-making process</i>	
Procedural justice	.462** (.157)
<i>Controls</i>	
Tenure	.011 (.011)
Team size	.018 (.039)
Resource scarcity	.101 (.159)
R^2	.677
Adjusted R^2	.629
F	14.068**
* = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$	
Note: Sample size = 55.	

Table 6 presents an overview of the multiple regression model, including the unstandardized coefficients and the standard errors. The model, which controls for tenure, team size and resource scarcity, explains almost two-thirds of the variation in strategic-decision quality. It is also statistically significant. The

statistical results support information processing theory, but offer some nuance. First, the coefficients of strategic planning and performance management are indeed positive and significant as anticipated in H1 and H3. Second, the coefficient of procedural justice of the decision-making process is also positive and significant as anticipated in H4. Moreover, based on the significant coefficients in our results, procedural justice is the strongest predictor of strategic-decision quality. Conflictingly, the coefficient of performance measurement has a negative sign and is non-significant thus leading to the rejection of H2.

3.5. Discussion

The results imply that both rational planning practices and procedurally just decision-making processes can contribute to strategic-decision quality in public organizations. The study offers support for the importance of both organizational information processes as well as behavior by decision-makers in public sector decision-making as argued by information processing theory (Kim & Mauborgne, 1995; Rogers et al., 1999). Controlling for rational planning practices, procedural justice is a significant predictor of strategic-decision quality. Controlling for procedural justice, strategic planning and performance management are significant predictors of strategic-decision quality. The non-significance of performance measurement, however, requires a more nuanced perspective. Hence, the contributions of our study results to public management research are threefold.

First, the study contributes to the debate on rational planning's effectiveness in public organizations by testing the relation between three rational planning practices (i.e. strategic planning, performance measurement and performance management) and strategic-decision quality in a sample of 55 Flemish pupil guidance centers. Although several authors have criticized the appropriateness of rational planning in public organizations (e.g. Bovaird, 2008; Radin, 2006), our findings suggest that, in the context of Flemish pupil guidance centers, strategic planning and performance management are positively related to strategic-decision quality. These findings tie in with other empirical studies that identified benefits associated with the adoption of rational planning practices in public organizations worldwide, including Canadian public service organizations (Elbanna, Andrews, & Pollanen, 2015), US public transit agencies (Ugboro et al., 2011), English local government (Walker et al., 2010) and Seoul Metropolitan City in South Korea (Im & Lee, 2012).

While the criticism towards rational planning practices in public organizations is potent, it does not, thus far, seem to result in a variety of empirical evidence that presents significant negative consequences associated with the adoption of rational planning in the public sector. Empirical evidence of significant positive consequences seems to be more frequent (Bryson et al., 2010; George & Desmidt, 2014; Poister et al., 2010; Walker & Andrews, 2015).

Second, the non-significant result for performance measurement supports the call for more contingency-based research on rational planning in order to discover which practices work in which situation (Bryson et al., 2010; Walker & Andrews, 2015). Flemish pupil guidance centers are public human services organizations focusing on the enhancement of the wellbeing of pupils in the Flemish education system. This is entirely different and, arguably, more difficult to quantify than the 'harder' objectives of, for instance, public transit agencies (Poister et al., 2013). The low mean score of performance measurement (3.87 on a Likert- scale of 1-7) does indeed indicate that, on average, Flemish pupil guidance centers are less inclined to use performance measures or numerical targets to track their progress towards strategic goals. In line with the findings of Julnes and Holzer (2001) and Nomm and Randma-Liiv (2012), we argue that the low average score of performance measurement in Flemish pupil guidance centers can possibly be attributed to a lack of resources and a politically unstable environment. Similar to public organizations worldwide, the financial crisis and the resulting austerity measures within the Flemish government resulted in severe budgetary cuts for Flemish pupil guidance centers. A lack of resources inhibits the adoption of performance measurement in public organizations because technical difficulties and challenges during adoption require intensive investment and expertise (Boyne et al., 2004; Julnes & Holzer, 2001). Flemish pupil guidance centers have also been mentioned in the Government of Flanders 2014-2019 coalition agreement as being subjected to reforms that are aimed at eradicating overlap and fragmentation. As such, the pending reforms generate a politically unstable situation where there might not be a 'sense of urgency' to adopt performance measurement systems (Nomm & Randma-Liiv, 2012). If performance measurement is not really adopted by Flemish pupil guidance centers, statements about performance measurement's relation with strategic-decision quality based on our statistical analysis could be premature. We thus follow the argument of Boyne, Gould-Williams, Law, and Walker (2002, 706) and conclude that performance measurement in

Flemish pupil guidance centers 'may provide more information on performance, but its impact [...] will depend on whether and how it is used'.

Third, our evidence indicates that strategic planning, performance management and procedural justice are associated with higher levels of strategic-decision quality. The positive relation between strategic planning and strategic-decision quality implies that the information-processing capability of strategic planning can help public organizations in their decision-making processes (Rogers et al., 1999). During strategic planning, information regarding a public organization's environment is systematically gathered and converged into a set of strategic issues, based on which strategic goals for the organization are selected (Bryson, 2011; Poister et al., 2013). Strategic planning thus plays an important converging role by deliberately transforming a vast amount of information into a specific set of strategic goals that can then systematically inform decisions on an ongoing basis within public organizations (Poister, 2005; Poister & Streib, 2005). Hence, through the deliberate and systematic formulation of strategic goals, strategic planning ensures that decisions are made to achieve overarching strategic goals as opposed to solely address political or intuitive motives (Boyne, 2001; Walker et al., 2010). Since strategic planning is often a cornerstone of public sector reforms (Bryson et al., 2010; Ugboro et al., 2011), the positive relation between strategic planning's deliberate, systematic and converging approach to information processing, and strategic-decision quality is relevant for a variety of public organizations worldwide.

Our results also imply that linking the strategic goals to individual objectives and evaluations of key staff (e.g. directors) through performance management significantly predicts strategic-decision quality. As hypothesized, this finding suggests that performance management bridges the gap between strategic goals of the organization and goals of individuals, and ensures that it is in the best interest of individuals to include the strategic priorities of the organization in their decision-making processes (Poister & Streib, 2005). While strategic planning thus ensures that strategic goals are formulated, performance management ensures that the implementation of strategic goals is assigned to key individuals within the organizations (Poister, 2010; Poister & Van Slyke, 2002). Interestingly enough, while strategic planning is an often-mentioned cornerstone of public sector reforms (Boyne, 2001; Bryson et al., 2010), linking plans and individuals via performance management is not (Poister, 2010). We argue that the positive decision-making impact of

performance management merits further inquiry by public management scholars. By connecting the strategic plan to the objectives and stakeholder evaluations of key employees such as directors and other decision-makers, public organizations align these individuals with the organizational strategy (Poister & Streib, 2005). Performance management could prove to be a key incentive for including strategic goals and stakeholder expectations in decision-making because this would be in the best interest of one's own individual objectives.

Our findings also suggest that procedural justice of the decision-making process significantly predicts strategic-decision quality. Not only is its coefficient significant and positive, it also has the highest value out of all significant predictors in our model. This study offers support for the procedural justice model of decision-making as argued by Kim and Mauborgne (1995). Decision-makers in Flemish pupil guidance centers who believe they are allowed to participate in decision-making processes, exercise their voice during decision-making processes and, if necessary, appeal decisions (Rubin, 2009), also on average report higher degrees of strategic-decision quality. While organizational information processes such as strategic planning and performance management are important, this study offers empirical evidence that in order to understand strategic-decision quality in the public sector we cannot oversimplify the context by neglecting the importance of individual behavior within decision-making teams. The extent to which decision makers are allowed to exchange information during decision-making can be expected to be of crucial importance in order to fully comprehend the quality of strategic decisions in public organizations (Bryson et al., 2009; George & Desmidt, 2014).

Future empirical research could focus on other output attributed to rational planning practices in public organizations (e.g. strategic-decision commitment, understanding or consensus) (Kellermanns et al., 2011; Yang, Sun, & Eppler, 2009). Such research is especially interesting for public strategic management because output of rational planning practices is argued to be an antecedent to outcomes such as organizational performance (Kellermanns et al., 2011; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Mediated models could also be constructed to test if strategic-decision quality, as key process output of rational planning, indeed mediates the relationship between rational planning practices and organizational performance in public organizations. This would help us gain insights into the complex causality underlying rational planning and

performance in the public sector (Boyne, 2001), as well as illustrate the ‘bottom-line’ importance of process output such as strategic-decision quality.

While procedural justice offers a multidimensional starting point, future studies could incorporate a variety of decision-making behavior into empirical models. For instance, assuming that interpersonal treatment needs to encourage information exchange between decision-makers during decision-making, group dynamics such as conflict, trust and communication between decision-makers offer valuable research avenues (Carmeli et al., 2012; Olson et al., 2007). Apart from focusing on behavior during decision-making, one could also assess the impact of individual perceptions towards the rational planning practices. For instance, how could acceptance of rational planning practices influence the informational role of rational planning in decision-making? If rational planning practices are coerced by central government but not accepted by individuals, this might result in a refusal to incorporate information generated by these practices in decision-making (e.g. Andrews et al., 2009a).

Finally, in order to generate insights into how performance measurement can be useful for decision-making in public human services organizations, future research efforts such as single and multi-case studies could present best practices in specific public human services organizations or compare performance measurement systems across organization types. Future empirical research could also expand the scope of this study by including antecedents and measures of performance information usage because performance measurement does not necessarily illustrate the usage of performance information in decision-making (Taylor, 2011).

3.6. Limitations

Although our findings are interesting, some limitations need to be considered. First, our study was conducted in Flanders, findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. Second, we focused on Flemish pupil guidance centers. These organizations are unique to the Flemish educational system. Findings may vary based on a different set of contingencies (e.g. local government). Third, our study was cross-sectional and offers a snapshot. Longitudinal data could extend the analysis over time and offer more robust evidence. Fourth, we utilized perceptual data based on a multi-informant survey. When available, a variety

of data sources (e.g. multiple surveys, archival data) could help counter some of the issues associated with perceptual data drawn from one survey-based source.

3.7. Conclusion

This study revisits the debate on rational planning's effectiveness in the public sector by adopting a decision-making perspective grounded in information processing theory. The results suggest that strategic planning and performance management are rational planning practices that inject information into decision-making thus contributing to strategic-decision quality. However, the non-significance of performance measurement supports previous pleas for more contingency-based planning research. Our results also illustrate that more attention towards the behavior of decision-makers during decision-making processes is merited because procedural justice of the decision-making process is the strongest predictor of strategic-decision quality. Nevertheless, due to the limited dataset, further research is required to confirm if these findings hold within another context. Such research could investigate the predictors of strategic-decision quality in the public sector by testing the impact of both organizational information processes as well as the behavior of decision-makers during decision making processes. For now, however, this study suggests that rational planning practices and procedurally just decision-making process matter to public sector decision-making.

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CHAPTER 4: RATIONAL PLANNING AND POLITICIANS' PREFERENCES FOR SPENDING AND REFORM: REPLICATION AND EXTENSION OF A SURVEY EXPERIMENT

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ABSTRACT - The rational planning cycle of formulating strategic goals and using performance information to assess goal implementation is assumed to assist decision-making by politicians. Empirical evidence supporting this assumption is scarce. Our study replicates Nielsen and Baekgaard's (2015) experiment on the relation between performance information and politicians' preferences for spending and reform and extends this experiment by investigating the role of strategic goals. Based on a randomized survey experiment (1.484 Flemish city councilors) and an analysis of 225 strategic plans, we found that information on low and high performance as well as strategic goals impact politicians' preferences for spending and reform.

4.1. Introduction

Although rational planning practices in the public sector have been around since the 1970s, it was the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm that fast tracked rational planning's popularity in public organizations (Andrews et al. 2009b, Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010). Central to the rational planning approach is the use of (a) strategic planning to define strategic goals based on environmental scanning and (b) performance measurement to evaluate the implementation of the formulated strategic goals (Boyne 2001, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013). The popularity of strategic planning and performance measurement, the two central rational planning practices, seems to indicate that several benefits accompany their adoption (Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010). One often-cited benefit is the counterweight that strategic planning and performance measurement can offer to intuitive and gut-feeling decision-making in public organizations (Walker and Boyne 2006, Boyne 2001). Specifically, strategic planning and performance measurement are expected to ensure that 'decisions between alternative strategies [are] taken logically on the basis of comprehensive information, rather than intuitively on the basis of incomplete or inaccurate data' (Boyne 2001, 76).

Despite the popularity and assumed impact of strategic planning and performance measurement, empirical evidence on the relation between strategic planning, performance measurement and decision-making in public organizations is scarce (Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010, Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010, George and Desmidt 2014). The lack of empirical evidence can be attributed to four limitations of public management research on the subject. First, studies have predominantly focused on organizational performance as dependent variable (e.g. Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Andrews et al. 2009a), as opposed to the decision-making output of rational planning (George and Desmidt 2014). Decision-making output is a more direct result of rational planning processes and, as such, precedes outcomes such as performance (George and Desmidt 2014, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). Second, data have mostly been gathered through cross-sectional surveys (e.g. Poister and Streib 2005, Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2015) which call into question whether causal inference is possible (Jakobsen and Jensen 2014, Margetts 2011). Third, the typical unit of analysis has been the organizational level (e.g. Walker and Boyne 2006, Elbanna, Andrews, and

Pollanen 2015) whereas decision-making often manifests at the individual level (Margetts 2011). Fourth, survey respondents have mostly been managers and other administrative staff (e.g. Poister and Streib 2005, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013) although decision-making in public organizations is strongly politicized (Askim 2009, Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015).

One study that addresses these four limitations and offers insights into the relationship between rational planning and decision-making, is Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). Their study employs a randomized survey experiment with 844 Danish city councilors to assess whether performance information impacts politicians' preferences for spending and reform. They find that, in the case of Danish city councilors, performance information can indeed affect politicians' preferences for spending and reform and use a blame avoidance perspective to explain the detected impact. Nevertheless, despite the valuable findings of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015), two issues remain unresolved. First, the limited external validity of experiments (Aguinis and Bradley 2014) requires replication in a set of different contingencies in order to maximize the generalizability of study findings. Second, while Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) offer evidence on the impact of performance information (i.e. rational planning's approach to strategy implementation) on politicians' decision-making processes, the role of strategic goals as a framework that guides decision-making (i.e. rational planning's approach to strategy formulation) remains unclear. Conflictingly, rational planning proposes a sequence between strategy formulation and implementation (Andrews et al. 2009b) whereby the defined strategic goals offer a framework that guides the usage of performance information during decision-making (Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Poister 2005).

Our study addresses these issues by offering what Tsang and Kwan (1999) define as a generalization and extension study in their typology of replication studies. First, we replicate the experiment of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) with a different population (1.484 Flemish city councilors). We thus test whether Nielsen and Baekgaard's (2015) findings on the relationship between performance information and politicians' preferences for spending and reform can be generalized to the context of Flemish city councilors. This contribution ties in with the recent call for more consideration of public management context (O'Toole and Meier 2015). Although both Flanders and Denmark have similarities (e.g. elected local politicians, located within a member state of the European Union and comparable population size), there is also a unique

distinctiveness between the two settings. Denmark is one of the most decentralized states worldwide with the Danish municipalities being responsible for a wide range of core welfare services. Additionally, Danish municipalities tend to be very large (only four Danish municipalities have a population below 10.000 inhabitants). Although sharing similar policy domains with their Danish counterparts, the Flemish municipal context is quite different. Flemish municipalities are part of a complex multilevel governance system which includes the Flemish Government as well as the Belgian Federal Government and where responsibilities are, to some extent, shared between these different levels. Additionally, although having a similar population size, Flanders counts more than three times as many municipalities as Denmark. Both contextual elements might influence the blame avoidance strategies of local politicians in Flanders as (a) local media markets tend to be more developed in larger municipalities, making it easier for politicians from smaller municipalities to 'get lost in the masses', and (b) if blame indeed occurs, it is not necessarily transparent who exactly is to blame (local government, Flemish Government or Belgian Federal Government).

Second, we extend the experiment by including the presence of strategic goals as a moderator in the relation between performance information and politicians' preferences for spending and reform. By including strategic goals in the equation, we offer insights into the assumed interplay between strategic goals derived from strategic planning processes, performance information regarding these strategic goals and decision-making output in public organizations (Poister 2010, Bryson 2010). Moreover, by focusing on the predictors of decision-making attitudes by politicians (i.e. city councilors), we provide insights on an often neglected unit of analysis in rational planning research (Askim 2009, Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015).

To achieve these contributions, we employ a randomized survey experiment and a document analysis of strategic plans. As such, our research design counterbalances issues arising from using one cross-sectional, non-randomized survey to measure both independent and dependent variables (i.e. common method bias) and allows us to focus on individual-level preferences while also incorporating organizational-level variables (Margetts 2011, Jakobsen and Jensen 2014). In what follows, we first define our hypotheses, followed by the methods, the statistical results and the findings. The study results suggest that performance information showing low performance positively impacts politicians' preferences for spending whereas performance information showing high performance negatively impacts politicians' preferences for reform. Both results

are in line with the findings of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). Contrary to our expectations, we do not find evidence that strategic goals increase the impact of information showing either low or high performance but we do find that strategic goals have a direct positive impact on politicians' preferences for spending. We discuss these findings and their implications.

4.2. Performance information and decision-making by politicians

Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) formulate a set of hypotheses on the relation between performance information and decision-making by politicians. They operationalize political decision-making as politicians' preferences for spending and reform. Both spending and reform are important because they are 'two of the primary concerns of performance-based budgeting' (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, 546). Responsible politicians who seek to efficiently and effectively assign public resources could penalize weak performers by allocating fewer resources to their activities or by encouraging reforms that limit managerial autonomy (Carpenter and Krause 2012, Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015). Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) employ a blame avoidance perspective to hypothesize politicians' reactions to performance information. The blame avoidance perspective argues that politicians' decision-making can be predicted based on politicians' tendency to avoid blame for negative events and the resulting 'bad press' because this might damage a potential re-election (Soroka 2006). Conversely, politicians might actively try to attribute positive events to their own efforts in order to convince the public of their competence (Carpenter and Krause 2012, Hood 2011, Moynihan 2012).

First, applied to the relation between performance information and politicians' preferences for spending, blame avoidance theory implies that information on low performance cannot go unaddressed (Hood 2011, Moynihan 2012). Politicians are expected to actively address low performance and the 'obvious way for elected politicians to improve performance – or at least to appear to be doing so' is to increase funding (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, 550). However, whereas low performance requires action because of the public scrutiny it might evoke, high performance of public services frequently goes unnoticed (Hood 2011,

Lau 1982). Because of the limited public coverage of high performance as opposed to low performance, there is no political rationale to increase funding for high performing public services. Thus, given the asymmetric public coverage of low versus high performance, 'credit claiming will be of much less importance than blame avoidance' (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, 551). Finally, information on average performance seems to neither fit with politicians' tendency to avoid blame nor with politicians' tendency to claim credit. Blame avoidance theory does not expect politicians to assign significantly less or significantly more budget resources when confronted with information on average performance (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015). This results in the following three hypotheses:

H1: Performance information showing low performance has a positive impact on politicians' preferences for public spending in the same policy area.

H2: Performance information showing high performance has no impact on politicians' preferences for public spending in the same policy area.

H3: Performance information showing average performance has no impact on politicians' preferences for public spending in the same policy area.

In the original study, support is found for the first hypothesis, whereas, in contrast to the theoretical expectations, a positive and a negative effect are identified for hypothesis 2 and 3.

Second, the relation between performance information and politicians' preferences for reform can also be explained from a blame avoidance perspective. Typically, the main rationale underlying reforms in public organizations is the expectation of politicians that these reforms will improve performance (Boyne et al. 2005, Ashworth, Boyne, and Delbridge 2009). Reforms can be used by politicians to both address current negative events, and the resulting blame, as well as prevent future blame-inciting negative events (Hood 2011). Nevertheless, reform can, in itself, become a source of extensive blame when the expected reform outcomes are not achieved or when crucial stakeholders vigorously and publicly criticize the content of the reform (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, Walker and Boyne 2006). Thus, '[u]ndertaking reform is therefore a risky endeavor that requires a balancing of the blame risks involved in the pursuit or nonpursuit of reform' (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, 552).

Consequently, politicians confronted with performance information signaling high performance might be less inclined to initiate reforms because of the risks associated with such initiatives (Hood 2011). As the status quo already illustrates high performance, the potential benefits of the reform do not outweigh the potential risk of receiving strong and vocal criticism (Carpenter and Krause 2012, Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015). However, as indicated earlier, blame avoidance particularly argues that performance information showing low performance requires prompt political action (Hood 2011, Moynihan 2012). As such, '[r]esponding with reform can be an effective way of signaling that something is being done about the problem' (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, 553). Information on low performance can also be employed to inject credibility into the necessity of the reform, which in turn minimizes the risk of strong criticism (Carpenter and Krause 2012). Finally, given the limited blame or potential praise resulting from average performance, information on average performance seems to not spark negative nor positive preferences for reforms (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015). This results in the following three hypotheses:

H4: Performance information showing high performance has a negative impact on politicians' preferences for reform in the same policy area.

H5: Performance information showing low performance has a positive impact on politicians' preferences for reform in the same policy area.

H6: Performance information showing average performance has no impact on politicians' preferences for reform in the same policy area.

For this set of hypotheses, the original study finds evidence supporting hypothesis 4 and 6, while no significant impact of low performance information is identified.

4.3. Moderating influence of strategic goals

In extension to the randomized survey experiment of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015), we include the presence of strategic goals related to the performance indicator as a moderator in the relation between performance information and politicians' preferences for spending and reform. Policymakers define strategic goals during strategic planning and employ performance information to monitor and evaluate the

realization of these goals (Andrews et al. 2009b, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013). This rational planning cycle of formulating strategic goals and then periodically evaluating them based on performance information has been central to reforms such as Best Value in the UK, the Government Performance and Results Act in the US and the Policy and Management Cycle in Flanders (Boyne et al. 2002, Poister and Streib 2005, George and Desmidt 2014). As such, we argue that defining strategic goals and using performance information are, in practice, often interconnected and can be expected to interact during decision-making. This assumed interconnectivity of strategic goals and performance information is supported by recent literature on performance management in public organizations (e.g. Moynihan 2008, Walker, Damanpour, and Devece 2010). Poister, Pasha, and Edwards (2013, 1), for example, define performance management in public organizations as ‘engaging in strategic planning to establish a direction and major goals, setting more specific objectives and perhaps targets at multiple levels in the organization, and then using performance measurement to help focus on achieving them’. Moynihan (2008, 5), in turn, stresses the relationship with decision-making by defining performance management as ‘a system that generates performance information through strategic planning and performance measurement routines and that connects this information to decision venues’. In addition, both Poister (2010) and Bryson (2010) indicate that the link between strategic goals and performance information is of critical importance to public organizations and merits further inquiry by public management scholars.

The remaining question is how this interconnectivity can be operationalized into hypotheses on the relation between strategic goals, performance information, and politicians’ preferences for spending and reform. Similar to the previous section, we draw on a blame avoidance perspective to derive the hypotheses. One of the main arguments of blame avoidance theory is that the impact of performance information is contingent on the amount of potential blame for negative events or potential acclaim for positive events (Carpenter and Krause 2012, Hood 2011, Moynihan 2012). This can be directly linked to strategic goals. Rational planning systems typically require politicians and administrators to formalize policy choices in strategic goals, which are an important signifier of the performance regime that is in place (Boyne et al. 2002, George and Desmidt 2014). Specifically, strategic goals are the subject of an accountability system in which organizations are expected to periodically report on their performance on these goals to specific

stakeholders (Boyne et al. 2002). Hence, politicians are likely to be criticized when performance on strategic goals is bad or be praised when performance on strategic goals is good. Because of the accountability tied to the achievement of strategic goals, we expect these goals to offer a framework of policy challenges that are particularly salient for politicians and thus prone to blame avoidance strategies. Hence, we argue that the impact of performance information on politicians' preferences for spending and reform will be stronger when the policy area for which information is provided is also a strategic goal of the organization. This results in the following three hypotheses:

H7: The positive relation between information showing low performance and politicians' preference for spending is stronger when the policy area on which performance information is provided is a strategic goal of the public organization.

H8: The positive relation between information showing low performance and politicians' preferences for reform is stronger when the policy area on which performance information is provided is a strategic goal of the public organization.

H9: The negative relation between information showing high performance and politicians' preferences for reform is stronger when the policy area on which performance information is provided is a strategic goal of the public organization.

4.4. Methods

REPLICATION STRATEGY AND UNITS OF ANALYSIS

A range of replication strategies exist based on the selected population (i.e. same dataset, same population, different population) and measurement (i.e. same measurement and analysis, different measurement and/or analysis) (Tsang and Kwan 1999). As indicated in our introduction, our replication is aimed at generalizing Nielsen and Baekgaard's (2015) findings to a different population and extending these findings by including strategic goals in our analysis. Importantly, our extension draws on secondary data (i.e. coding strategic plans) and does not require a significant alteration of the original study's independent (IV) and dependent variables (DV). As such, we aim to avoid a critique of 'generalization and extension' replications,

namely that the findings derived from such replications might not be comparable to the original study's findings due to a significant alteration of the original IV's and DV's (Tsang and Kwan 1999). In our study, the generalization is based on a replication that uses similar IV's, DV's and methods as the original study whereas the extension is based on the inclusion of secondary data in our statistical analysis. We thus aim for a population where the conditions for studying the impact of performance information on politicians' preferences for spending and reform resemble those of the Danish case, and which simultaneously allows us to incorporate secondary data on strategic goals. Finally, because the original hypotheses were derived from blame avoidance theory and the main findings of the original study support this theory, we decided to retest the same theory-driven hypotheses of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015).

Because Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) focus on the policy area of municipal education and city councilors as units of analysis, we adopted a similar approach. As a result, data were collected among the city councilors of the 225 Flemish municipalities that offer municipal education (73% of all Flemish municipalities). Apart from the advantage of replicating the setting of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015), another advantage is tied to the selected empirical setting. An often-cited criticism of survey experiments is the lack of a realistic context and a representative sample (Aguinis and Bradley 2014, Margetts 2011). A way to address this is 'to increase the level of immersion experienced by participants – the subjective experience of being personally immersed in the situation described in the vignette' (Aguinis and Bradley 2014, 361). This high level of immersion is present in our experiment, because our units of analysis are actual city councilors, we offer them true performance information on a policy area they are familiar with, and identify their preferences for reform and spending on this policy area, which is closely linked to the actual decisions expected of them.

DATA COLLECTION

Data for our independent and dependent variables were gathered via a randomized survey experiment involving the city councilors of 225 Flemish municipalities. The survey experiment was planned, implemented and reported based on the best practices recommendations of Aguinis and Bradley (2014). Because our experiment is a replication aimed at generalization, the planning phase was straightforward

and mainly consisted of a thorough scanning of the original experiment to identify all parameters for the replication. During the implementation phase, we decided to focus on Flemish city councilors as a population because, for generalization purposes, we required a different population than Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) but one that was still similar enough to allow the same level of immersion. The actual data collection process consisted of three phases. First, the contact information of the city councilors was gathered through the municipal website. This resulted in a population of 5.462 city councilors. Second, these city councilors were randomly assigned to either a control group or a treatment group. Third, an electronic survey was sent to the city councilors. The surveys sent to the two groups were identical, apart from our experimental intervention: the treatment group received information on the actual performance of their municipality, whereas the control group did not receive this information. In total, 1.484 councilors cooperated, which results in a response rate of 27%². Our subsequent selection of relevant data analytic techniques was based on the original study. Finally, in the reporting phase of our experiment, we aimed to be as transparent as possible in our research design in order to ensure replicability in different contexts (Aguinis and Bradley 2014).

Data for our moderating variable were gathered via a document analysis of the municipal strategic plans of the previously identified 225 Flemish municipalities. As a result of legislative requirements, Flemish municipalities had to formulate a strategic plan by January 2014. Central to that plan is the definition of strategic goals which the municipal policy makers are committed to achieve during their 2014-2019 policy cycle. Municipal strategic plans are systematically collected by a central Flemish agency and can be publicly consulted.

² The respondents are largely representative of the full population in terms of available observables. We found no differences between the respondents and non-respondents in terms of gender composition and age. Only members of the fairly small Green Party were significantly overrepresented in the sample (4.9 percent compared to 3.7 percent in the population). The primary differences between the respondents and non-respondents concern geographical representation, where the over-representation of councilors from the province of Antwerp was statistically significant, whereas councilors from the province of Flemish-Brabant and the province of Limburg were under-represented. Yet, in substantial terms these differences were of limited size. (See the online appendix for further detail). We briefly note that although the question of representativeness can warrant caution in terms of generalizability, it does not affect the causal interpretation of the findings.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) operationalize performance information through the average grade of pupils in the final public school exam within a municipality taking into account the social composition of these pupils. The reason why Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) employ such information is threefold. First, public schooling 'is considered one of the major municipal tasks in Danish municipalities' (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, 556). Second, the average grade of pupils is readily available information, which implies that true information on performance can be assigned to the treatment group. Third, such information on the quality of public schooling is especially prone to media attention in Denmark, which is important from a blame-avoidance perspective (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015).

The specific performance indicator used by the original study poses a practical issue in our replication. Specifically, in the Flemish context information on the average grade of pupils, controlled for social composition, in municipalities is not readily available nor scrutinized by the media. Thus, in order to ensure the same high level of immersion in our survey experiment as the original study, a different performance indicator relevant to the Flemish context needed to be selected. We opted to focus on performance information concerning educational capacity in primary education within municipalities because this indicator has the same relevant characteristics as the original indicator. First, educational capacity in primary schools, which measures the extent to which children living in a municipality can also attend a primary school in this municipality, is a core responsibility of Flemish municipalities. Second, true performance information on educational capacity in primary education in Flemish municipalities is available from the Flemish Ministry of Education. Third, information on educational capacity in primary education is frequently scrutinized by the Flemish media. Examples include, for instance, articles on parents who have to spend the night in front of primary schools in their municipality in order to ensure a place for their child - a practice which the Flemish Minister for Education has strongly condemned³. Although academic achievement and educational capacity are different indicators, the respondents in our dataset generally consider educational capacity a relevant performance indicator of the municipality. Only 24 per cent of the

³ Examples of these articles in Dutch are available from the authors upon request.

respondents disagree to some extent with the statement that ‘Educational capacity is an important indicator of how well our municipality performs in the area of municipal schooling’ while 54 per cent of the respondents, somewhat agree, agree, or totally agree with the statement⁴. Moreover, Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) use a socio-economically controlled measure of performance, partly because student academic outcomes are strongly influenced by students’ social backgrounds, and partly because this type of value-added data resembles what Danish city councilors would normally receive. As we focus on educational capacity rather than outcomes, correcting for socio-economic differences is less of a concern here and the uncorrected measure of educational capacity more closely resembles the information Flemish city councilors actually receive.

Except from using a different indicator of performance, the assignment of performance information followed the exact same approach as Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). Based on the information gathered from the Flemish Ministry of Education on educational capacity in primary education, the 225 Flemish municipalities were assigned to three groups: the best, middle or worst third. Next, in the survey for the control group we only mentioned a general information cue on the importance of educational capacity in municipalities, whereas in the survey for the treatment group we mentioned both the general information cue as well as true information on the performance of their municipality (best – middle – worst third) concerning educational capacity in primary education⁵.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Because this study is a replication and extension of an existing experiment, our dependent variables were measured using the same approach as Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). Additionally, the flow of our survey is identical to that of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015), which implies that the dependent variables were measured in the survey after the treatment and after a set of questions on performance information usage.

First, preferences for spending were measured as follows:

⁴ This question was placed after the treatment and the descriptive statistics reported are therefore only based on respondents in the control group. The performance level has no impact on the perception of educational capacity as an indicator of performance among these respondents.

⁵ The exact vignette can be consulted in our online appendix.

“Preferences for spending were measured using a five-point scale battery in which the respondents were asked to indicate if they would prefer much less, less, the same, more, or much more spending on a number of different policy areas governed by the municipalities, while bearing in mind that increases in one area would affect spending opportunities in other areas [...], the item about preferences for spending on public schools was the only one of interest in the battery and placed as number 4 of 11 in the battery” (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, 557).

Second, the dependent variable preferences for reform did require two small contextual changes. Specifically, we measured politicians’ preferences for reform by using a single-item question that discussed a specific scenario. The scenario is mentioned below and the contextual change is indicated between brackets:

“Imagine a situation in which, according to forecasts, 4–8% of the budget for two [municipal] schools can be saved each year if all educational services are placed in one of the schools, while the other is closed. [Educational capacity] is not expected to be affected by the school merger. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the two schools ought to be merged in this case” (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015, 557)?

Respondents could indicate their answers on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = totally disagree, 10 = totally agree).

MODERATING VARIABLE

As indicated earlier, the moderating variable is based on the strategic goals present in the strategic plans of Flemish municipalities. These strategic goals represent the strategic priorities of the municipality. Identifying a specific policy domain or challenge as a strategic goal implies the commitment of the municipal council to explicitly follow-up on goal implementation. Importantly, municipalities are free to choose their own strategic priorities, and the subsequent strategic goals, but have to annually and explicitly report on the progress towards achieving these strategic goals. Because Flemish city councilors have to formally approve the strategic goals of their municipality as well as evaluate progress towards their achievement, we expect city councilors to be aware of these goals. Hence, it does not make sense to experimentally manipulate the presence of strategic goals. The goal of our analysis was thus to create a moderating variable that measures whether expanding educational capacity is one of the strategic goals of the municipality’s

strategic plan. Expanding educational capacity includes, for instance, investment in educational infrastructure within the municipality or subsidizing primary schools within the municipality to expand their capacity. If indeed such a strategic goal was present, we assigned a 1 to the municipality, if not, we assigned a 0. More specifically, 92 out of 225 municipalities included the expansion of educational capacity as a strategic goal in their strategic plan. Table 7 contains descriptive statistics on the independent, dependent, and moderating variables used in our analysis.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Treatment	0.508	0.500	0	1	1475
Strategic goal	0.406	0.491	0	1	1475
Preferences for spending	3.374	0.871	1	5	1453
Preferences for reform	5.419	3.178	0	10	1475

4.5. Analysis

BALANCE AND MANIPULATION CHECKS

Our analysis is conducted as a series of regressions. For each dependent variable we conduct four analyses: one for all respondents regardless of the performance of their municipality and one for each of the three performance categories. One concern is whether treatment and control groups balance with regard to their respondent composition. As can be seen from Table 8, there are only few and minor significant differences between control and treatment groups. To account for these differences, we reran all analyses using the predictors in Table 8 as controls. These robustness checks do not alter our findings substantially and for the sake of simplicity, we present the results from the replication analysis without controls.⁶

⁶ The robustness checks are presented in the online appendix.

Table 8: Balance test of differences between treatment and control groups

	[All]	[Low performance]	[Average performance]	[High performance]
Gender (female = 1)	0.090 (0.429)	0.143 (0.503)	-0.249 (0.271)	0.283 (0.113)
Age (years)	0.002 (0.638)	0.000 (0.966)	0.008 (0.375)	0.002 (0.780)
Level of education	-0.109 (0.103)	-0.098 (0.432)	-0.036 (0.785)	-0.205* (0.042)
City council tenure	0.001 (0.872)	-0.004 (0.760)	-0.003 (0.824)	0.005 (0.622)
<u>Party membership:</u> (<i>Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie is reference category</i>)				
Christen Democraten & Vlaams	0.157 (0.285)	0.030 (0.921)	0.374 (0.198)	0.222 (0.322)
Open Vld	0.185 (0.264)	0.328 (0.279)	0.433 (0.177)	0.149 (0.579)
Socialistische Partij Anders Groen	-0.369* (0.044)	-0.522 (0.313)	-0.008 (0.980)	-0.279 (0.310)
Vlaams Belang	0.471* (0.043)	-0.348 (0.450)	0.605 (0.105)	0.794* (0.047)
Partij van de Arbeid	-0.642+ (0.070)	-0.767 (0.269)	-1.146 (0.332)	-0.396 (0.379)
Andere	-1.340 (0.150)			-1.256 (0.234)
	0.093 (0.626)	0.121 (0.754)	-0.0518 (0.890)	0.433+ (0.091)
<u>Municipality level variables:</u>				
Strategic goal	0.161 (0.137)	0.099 (0.688)	0.102 (0.562)	0.136 (0.379)
Financial situation ¹	0.000 (0.948)	0.000 (0.419)	0.000 (0.369)	-0.000 (0.369)
Organization size ²	0.000 (0.639)	0.005* (0.026)	0.002 (0.366)	0.000 (0.242)
Deprivation ³	-0.026 (0.376)	-0.025 (0.779)	-0.183+ (0.052)	-0.101** (0.002)
Constant	0.249 (0.404)	-0.243 (0.840)	0.066 (0.824)	1.166+ (0.602)
<i>Chi</i> ²	27.03*	12.34	14.06	57.74**
<i>N</i> (politicians)	1435	393	457	585
<i>N</i> (municipalities)	221	72	74	75

Random effects logistic regression. Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level. P-values in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test). ¹Measured by the financial debt per capita in 2013. ²Measured by the number of fulltime equivalents in 2013. ³Measured by the unemployment rate in 2013.

Two conditions must be met for the performance information treatment to have an impact on politicians' preferences. First, the treatment should get through to the respondents. Second, the information presented in the treatment should not be common knowledge among respondents in the control group prior to the experiment. We test whether these conditions are met by means of a simple manipulation check. In the manipulation check, after the experimental treatment, we ask the respondents to indicate whether they agree or disagree with the following statement: 'My municipality is generally doing well in terms of providing primary education of a high quality'. If indeed the conditions are fulfilled, we would expect performance to have a positive impact on their level of agreement with this question – but only among those respondents who received the treatment. The analysis in Table 9 shows exactly this pattern.

Table 9: Manipulation check: Impact of performance information treatment on perception of municipal performance, split by performance group

	[All]	[Low Performance]	[Average Performance]	[High Performance]
Performance information	-0.000 (0.999)	-0.304* (0.017)	-0.082 (0.420)	0.245** (0.007)
Constant	5.685** (0.000)	5.602** (0.000)	5.793** (0.000)	5.678** (0.000)
<i>Chi</i> ²	0.00	5.66*	0.65	7.29**
<i>N(politicians)</i>	1469	398	467	604
<i>N(municipalities)</i>	221	72	74	75

Random effects regression. Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level. P-values in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test).

THE REPLICATION: PERFORMANCE INFORMATION AND PREFERENCES FOR SPENDING AND REFORM

The impact of performance information on preferences for spending (H1-H3) is examined by means of ordered logistic regressions while random effects are used to study the impact on attitudes to reform (H4-H6). Both analyses use clustered robust standard errors to account for clustering at the municipal level. To keep the analysis

as simple as possible, the impact of the performance information treatment is studied within each performance group. The findings for the analysis focusing on preferences for spending are reported in Table 10.

Table 10: Impact of performance information treatment on preferences for spending, split by performance group

	[All]	[Low performance]	[Average performance]	[High performance]
Performance information	0.074 (0.460)	0.320+ (0.083)	0.310+ (0.053)	-0.258 (0.145)
<i>Chi</i> ²	0.55	3.01+	3.73+	2.12
<i>N(politicians)</i>	1461	394	466	601
<i>N(municipalities)</i>	221	72	74	75

Ordered logistic regression. Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level. P-values in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test).

From a theoretical perspective, our expectations about the impact of performance information are strongest for the group of politicians from low performing municipalities. In accordance with our expectations (H1), we find that these respondents are more inclined to support higher spending if they have received the performance information treatment.

Moving to hypothesis 2 and 3, our theoretical expectations are somewhat weaker. We identify a positive impact of performance information for politicians from average performing municipalities. This finding is unexpected from a theoretical point of view and opposes the negative effect identified by Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). Finally, in accordance with our theoretical expectations we find no effect of the treatment among politicians from high performing municipalities. Again, this finding differs from the positive impact identified in Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). In sum, our analysis partly supports the theoretical expectations (H1 and H3) and partly reflects the findings of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). It is worth noting that the blame avoidance perspective expects the strongest impact on politicians from low performing municipalities and this finding is consistently supported by both Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) and our analysis.

Table 11: Impact of performance information treatment on preferences for reform, split by performance group

	[All]	[Low performance]	[Average performance]	[High performance]
Performance information	-0.323* (0.044)	-0.043 (0.901)	-0.472+ (0.098)	-0.415+ (0.070)
Constant	5.602** (0.000)	5.448** (0.000)	5.616** (0.000)	5.713** (0.000)
<i>Chi</i> ²	4.05*	0.02	2.74+	3.27+
<i>N(politicians)</i>	1475	403	469	603
<i>N(municipalities)</i>	221	72	74	75

Random effects regression. Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level. P-values in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test).

Focusing on the impact of performance information on preferences for reform, the strongest impact is expected on politicians from high performing municipalities: less willingness to undertake reform is expected for those who have received the high performance information treatment. The negative and statistically significant coefficient in Table 11 for these respondents supports this expectation and is also consistent with the findings of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). For politicians from low performing municipalities a positive impact of the performance information treatment was expected. What we find is – consistent with Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) – a zero impact. Finally, we detect a negative effect of the treatment among respondents from average performing municipalities. This finding is fundamentally different from both our theoretical expectations and the findings of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015).

In sum, the findings in both the analysis of the effects on preferences for spending and reform are largely in accordance with our expectations derived from a blame avoidance perspective and also correspond fairly well with the findings of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). For politicians from average performing municipalities, however, the findings differ substantially from both our theoretical expectations and the findings of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015).

EXTENSION: THE MODERATING IMPACT OF STRATEGIC GOALS

We analyze the moderating impact of strategic goals by doing a stepwise interaction between the performance information treatment and the presence of strategic goals. The findings are presented in Table 12 and 13. Because strategic goals are not experimentally manipulated, we added controls to account for potential spurious effects in the analysis. In line with other studies on rational planning processes (e.g. Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2015, Boyne et al. 2005), controls include measures of the financial situation of the municipality, organizational size, and deprivation. These controls do not change the main conclusions and they are therefore not shown in the presentation although they were included in the analysis.⁷

⁷ The analyses including controls are presented in the online appendix.

Table 12: Interaction between performance information treatment and presence of strategic goal on spending preferences, split by performance group

	[All]	[Low performance]	[Average performance]	[High performance]		[All]	[Low performance]	[Average performance]	[High performance]
Performance information	0.112	0.351 ⁺	0.355 [*]	-0.238	0.253 ⁺	0.315	0.602 ^{**}	-0.102	
	(0.296)	(0.067)	(0.033)	(0.251)	(0.061)	(0.188)	(0.001)	(0.722)	
Strategic goal	0.260 [*]	0.260	0.313	0.164	0.443 [*]	0.211	0.634 [*]	0.332	
	(0.029)	(0.286)	(0.142)	(0.340)	(0.013)	(0.556)	(0.032)	(0.234)	
Performance information ×					-0.352	0.101	-0.649 ⁺	-0.303	
Strategic goal					(0.113)	(0.811)	(0.059)	(0.437)	
<i>Chi</i> ²	59.12 ^{**}	43.16 ^{**}	29.53 [*]	72.05 ^{**}	63.27	43.69 ^{**}	36.88 ^{**}	75.65 ^{**}	
<i>N</i> (politicians)	1413	382	452	579	1413	382	452	579	
<i>N</i> (municipalities)	221	72	74	75	221	72	74	75	

Ordered logistic regression. Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level. P-values in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test). The controls shown in Table 8 were part of the analysis, but their effects are for presentational purposes not shown in the table.

Table 13: Interaction between performance information treatment and presence of strategic goal on reform preferences, split by performance group

	[All]	[Low performance]	[Average performance]	[High performance]	[All]	[Low performance]	[Average performance]	[High performance]
Performance information	-0.339*	-0.050	-0.500 ⁺	-0.426 ⁺	-0.626**	-0.113	-1.035**	-0.607 ⁺
	(0.033)	(0.891)	(0.075)	(0.058)	(0.004)	(0.818)	(0.003)	(0.076)
Strategic goal	0.091	-0.213	-0.219	0.621*	-0.278	-0.299	-0.909 ⁺	0.397
	(0.651)	(0.571)	(0.561)	(0.037)	(0.293)	(0.562)	(0.066)	(0.309)
Performance information × Strategic goal					0.716*	0.173	1.446**	0.399
					(0.018)	(0.811)	(0.006)	(0.359)
Constant	5.483**	6.635**	4.723**	5.151**	5.607**	6.661**	4.888**	5.255**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)
<i>Chi</i> ²	75.00**	11.79	16.14 ⁺	78.93**	75.43**	11.82	18.90*	76.69**
<i>N(politicians)</i>	1413	382	452	579	1413	382	452	579
<i>N(municipalities)</i>	221	72	74	75	221	72	74	75

Random effects regression. Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level. P-values in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test). The controls shown in Table 8 were part of the analysis, but their effects are for presentational purposes not shown in this table.

The first models in Table 12 and 13 show the unconditional impact of performance information and strategic goals when controls are included. As can be seen, the controls do not make any substantial difference to our performance information estimates. As for the strategic goals, we find a general positive impact on preferences for spending. If expanding educational capacity is a municipal strategic goal, city councilors display a higher willingness to financially invest in the policy domain of education. On the other hand, we find a much less clear pattern with regard to the impact of strategic goals on reform, and the safest conclusion seems to be that these concepts are not correlated at all.

Moving to the conditional impact of performance information on strategic goals, the presence of strategic goals is expected to strengthen the impact of performance information. Specifically, performance information is expected to have a stronger positive impact on spending as well as reform among politicians from low performing municipalities if expanding educational capacity is a strategic goal in their strategic plan. Moreover, we expect a stronger negative impact on reform for politicians from high performing municipalities if expanding educational capacity is a strategic goal in their strategic plan. None of these expectations are supported by the data and hypothesis 7, 8 and 9 are therefore rejected. Hence, our main conclusion is that there is no sign that the presence of strategic goals increases the impact of performance information.

4.6. Discussion

The study at hand examines the relation between strategic goals, performance information and politicians' preferences for spending and reform. We thus contribute to the debate on rational planning's effectiveness by investigating the extent to which strategic goals and performance information, two constitutive elements of rational planning, influence decision-making by politicians. Hypotheses were defined by adopting a blame-avoidance perspective. In doing so, we replicate an experiment on the relation between performance information and politicians' preferences for spending and reform as well as extended this experiment by investigating the moderating role of strategic goals. The findings suggest that information on high and low performance as well as the presence of strategic goals influence political decision-making, without necessarily enforcing each other's impact. These findings have several implications.

Table 14: Summary of replication findings compared to theory and original findings

	Preferences for spending			Preferences for reform		
	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Original</i>	<i>Replication</i>	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Original</i>	<i>Replication</i>
Low performance	+	+	+	+	n.s.	n.s.
Average performance	n.s.	-	+	n.s.	n.s.	-
High performance	n.s.	+	n.s.	-	-	-

Non-significant = n.s.

The first objective of this study was to replicate the survey experiment of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) in order to test the generalizability of their findings. Table 14 contains an overview of how our replication adheres or differs from the theoretical expectations as well as the empirical findings in Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015). As is apparent in Table 14, our replication adheres to the two central outcomes of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015) as well as the theoretical expectations derived from blame avoidance theory. In the case of both Danish and Flemish city councilors, an experimental information treatment showing low performance has a positive impact on politicians' preferences for spending while information showing high performance has a negative impact on politicians' preferences for reform. Our findings thus suggest that the blame avoidance strategies underlying the Danish findings are also applicable in the Flemish context. Politicians who are confronted with information on low performance can be expected to adapt their budgetary decisions accordingly (Hood 2011, Moynihan 2012). A higher allocation of resources to the low performing policy domain is likely because budget increases signal that politicians are actively trying to tackle the low performance issue (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015). This finding deviates from the assumption of performance-based budgeting that politicians will penalize low performers by reducing resources. Politicians who are confronted with high performance information can be expected to find reform a high-risk, low-reward endeavor (Hood 2011, Carpenter and Krause 2012). In high performing policy domains, politicians are likely to find that the potential benefits of reform do not outweigh the potential blame resulting from failed reform initiatives, and in such cases politicians seem to be less favorable towards reforms (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015). These results also contribute to the debate on public management context by illustrating that, even in a context where blame is not easily assigned purely to the local level because of complex multilevel governance systems and where local media outlets might not in general be as developed as in the

larger Danish municipalities, blame avoidance remains adequate to understand local politicians' reactions to performance information (O'Toole and Meier 2015).

The second objective of this study was to identify whether the relation between performance information and politicians' preferences for spending and reform is stronger when the policy area on which information is provided is a strategic goal of the organization. Typically, rational planning cycles recommend the formulation of strategic goals and the periodical evaluation of these goals through performance information (Boyne et al. 2002). Hence, we argue that when performance information is related to a strategic goal of the organization, its impact on decision-making will be even stronger. Contrary to our hypotheses, we do not find evidence for this assumed interconnectivity between strategic goals and performance information (Poister 2010). Specifically, the relation between information on low and high performance and politicians' preferences for spending and reform is not stronger when the policy area on which information is provided is a strategic goal of the organization. It is worth noting, however, that the information treatment is based on a performance indicator published by the Flemish Ministry of Education, which measures the ratio of pupils living in a municipality that can also attend primary schooling in this municipality. Although this indicator reflects a policy concern faced by many Flemish municipalities, it might be the case that municipalities did not employ this specific indicator to measure progress towards their strategic goal of expanding educational capacity. Indeed, in most municipal plans, the indicators tied to this strategic goal were strongly output-related (e.g. invest a specific amount of money by a specific time) as opposed to effect-related (e.g. increase the ratio of number of pupils living in the municipality that can also go to a primary school in the municipality). Hence, if the strategic goal is not operationalized through an effect-oriented indicator similar to the one we employed, the lack of a significant interaction between the two might be explained by the fact that politicians do not perceive a connectivity between the strategic goal of expanding educational capacity on the one hand and the effects measured by our performance indicator on the other (Poister 2010, Bryson 2010).

Although the lack of moderation seems to be an uninspiring result of our extension, we would like to emphasize that our findings still suggest that strategic goals offer an important framework for decision-making by politicians. Specifically, we find that the presence of a strategic goal has a positive direct effect on politicians' preferences for spending. In a model that controls for performance information, financial situation, organizational size and deprivation, and individual characteristics of the city councilors, we find that city councilors are likely to spend

more on education if expanding educational capacity is indeed a strategic goal of their municipality's strategic plan. This finding supports the claim that strategic goals can 'provide overall direction for major decisions throughout the organization on an ongoing basis' (Poister 2005, 1053). The finding also counterbalances the criticism that strategic goals defined through strategic planning are often purely administrative with little influence on actual political decision-making (Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010). We do urge some caution with this finding as strategic goals are not randomized in our analysis and the above-mentioned finding is thus not based on experimental evidence.

4.7. Limitations

Some limitations of our study need to be taken into account. First, because we expect Flemish city councilors to be aware of the strategic goals of their municipality, we cannot randomize this information. Second, we operationalize political decision-making through politicians' preferences for spending and reform, which are of course not the only set of decisions politicians can make. Third, we focus on municipal education whereas other policy areas might be less salient and therefore less prone to blame-avoiding strategies. Fourth, our operationalization of reform focuses on one specific type of educational reform, namely school mergers. Fifth, our operationalization of strategic goals focuses on the presence of the goal, without looking at the characteristics of the defined goal such as goal ambiguity. Further research could address these limitations. Future experiments could focus on contexts where politicians are not aware of the strategic goals of their organization, and these goals can be randomly assigned. One could also wonder whether information on strategic goals and performance might influence politicians' attitudes to, for instance, managerial autonomy, make-buy-decisions or reform initiatives such as performance-related pay. Future studies could focus on other policy areas that are less salient than education to identify the extent to which our findings hold in different policy domains. Finally, future operationalization of strategic goals could incorporate a multidimensional perspective that looks at, for instance, goal ambiguity in extension to goal presence.

4.8. Conclusion

The evidence in this study leads us to conclude that rational planning has rightly been singled out as a process that influences political decision-making in public organizations. In this article, we offer generalizability to the

two core findings of Nielsen and Baekgaard (2015), namely that information on low and high performance can impact decision-making by politicians and this impact can be explained through blame avoidance theory. We also identify that strategic goals might not strengthen the impact of performance information, but rather can directly influence political decision-making. For now, our evidence thus suggests that both strategic goals and performance information make a difference to decision-making by politicians in public organizations, without necessarily enforcing each other's impact.

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CHAPTER 5: STRATEGIC PLANNING IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: A REVIEW OF MICRO-ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT - The effectiveness of strategic planning (SP) in public organizations is widely debated. Underlying this debate is the assumption that SP is a unidimensional process directly resulting in organizational performance. This study conceives SP as a multidimensional concept and adopts a strategy-as-practice framework. Based on this framework, we undertake a mixed research synthesis of 40 articles and find that public administration research centers around the micro-activities of SP process formality and process participation as independent variables, and the outcomes of process effectiveness, strategic legitimacy and organizational performance as dependent variables. The mixed research synthesis further indicates that a formal and participatory SP process - which is supported by top management - contributes to positive outcomes for public organizations. In conclusion, we propose several theoretical advancements to the field, including a service-dominant approach to SP, attention to the behavioral micro-foundations of SP and a resource-based view on SP as an organizational capability.

5.1. Introduction

Strategic planning (SP) in public organizations can be defined as “a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is (its identity), what it does (its strategies and actions), and why it does it (mandates, mission, goals, and the creation of public value)” (Bryson 2010, S256). Although the practice of SP in public organizations can be traced back to the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was the New Public Management (NPM) movement of the 1980s that made SP an ubiquitous practice among public organizations (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013). NPM even inspired governments worldwide to mandate SP’s adoption for a variety of public organizations (e.g. US Government Performance and Results Act and UK Local Government Act) (Boyne 2001, Poister and Streib 2005).

One of the main reasons why SP gained this almost normative status, is the fact that SP builds on the widespread recognition that a systematic, analytic and rational approach to strategy formulation is beneficial to public organizations (Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Bryson 2011, Poister and Streib 2005, Walker and Boyne 2006). Frequently cited benefits include enhanced strategic decision-making, greater coherence within the organization, improved communication within the organization, higher levels of commitment and support from internal and external stakeholders, enhanced intraorganizational coordination and improved organizational performance (Boyne 2001, Bryson 2011, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Walker et al. 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the widespread adoption of SP by public organizations as well as its often proclaimed relation with organizational outcomes (Boyne 2001), the debate about the effectiveness of SP is ongoing (Bovaird 2008, Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann 2011). After all, Mintzberg (1994) did declare the fall of SP over two decades ago. As such, SP’s presumed value has been suggested to be “a shot in the dark” (Walker and Boyne 2006, 375) as the complex relation between SP and organizational outcomes such as organizational performance in public organizations remains unknown (Boyne 2001).

The lack of insights into the relation between SP and organizational outcomes in public organizations has been suggested to be the result of a paucity of scholarly attention to the micro-activities of SP (Bryson

2010). Specifically, previous research displayed the tendency to interpret SP, almost mechanically, as a fixed, mechanical routine directly resulting in organizational performance and demonstrated a lack of attention to, for instance, the process characteristics of SP, the individuals and teams involved in SP, the strategy tools employed during SP and the potential outcomes of SP that precede organizational performance (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). Hence, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards (2010, 540) conclude that the knowledge deficit on the micro-activities and outcomes of SP and, more broadly, strategic management is so large “that it is difficult to envision recommending too much research”.

In response to this call for a deeper reservoir of knowledge on SP in public organizations, this study contributes to the literature by undertaking a mixed research synthesis (Sandelowski et al. 2012). A strategy-as-practice (SAP) based model is used to categorize and analyze the extant public administration literature drawing from Wolf and Floyd’s (2013) review of management studies on SP. By using SAP in our review, we explicitly address Bryson’s (2010) call for more insights into the micro-activities of SP in public organizations because SAP is an activity-based theory. Specifically, SAP seeks to make sense of “how” SP is conducted in practice and what outcomes might ensue (Jarzabkowski 2005, van Wessel, van Buuren, and van Woerkum 2011). Drawing on the SAP framework, three clusters of micro-activities are viewed as the building blocks of SP, namely the practitioners (i.e. the characteristics of individuals and teams involved in SP), the practices (i.e. the characteristics of the organizational SP process) and the praxis (i.e. the characteristics of analytical tools and instruments employed during SP) of SP (Wolf and Floyd 2013). The adopted SAP framework views these micro-activities as the antecedents of two categories of outcomes, namely proximate (i.e. direct planning outcomes such as enhanced decision-making) and distal outcomes (i.e. ultimate planning outcomes such as organizational performance) (Wolf and Floyd 2013). As such, the SAP framework provides insights into the relations underlying the micro-activities of SP and its proximate and distal outcomes. Thus, by using the SAP framework, this mixed research synthesis not only summarizes what is known (and not known) on the micro-activities and outcomes of SP in public organizations but also connects this “retrospective” on SP in public organizations with contemporary work in strategic management (Wolf and Floyd 2013).

Our look backwards on SP research in public administration scholarship is aimed at progressing research and theory now. First, we undertake an extensive assessment of our current knowledge on the elements of SP that have “worked” in public organizations by synthesizing the research evidence of the past 30 years in top public administration journals. Second, by comparing the research focus of public administration scholarship to that of strategic management scholarship, we identify a theory-driven research agenda on SP in public organizations that will help guide future research initiatives.

In the next section, we discuss the SAP framework. This is followed by a discussion of the methods. A mixed research synthesis is implemented to integrate the findings of 40 qualitative and quantitative articles. Findings indicate that public administration research has focused on the practices of process formality and process participation, the proximate outcome of process effectiveness and the distal outcomes of organizational performance and strategic legitimacy. The studies reviewed also indicate that the adoption of a formal and participatory SP process, which is supported by top management, contributes to positive outcomes for public organizations. We conclude with the implications of these findings for public administration research and theory.

5.2. Theoretical framework

Research on SP in public organizations has strongly drawn from the theoretical framework of rational planning theory (Elbanna 2006). Rational planning theory argues that a formal and comprehensive approach to strategy formulation, which is based on environmental scanning and developing strategic options, will positively impact organizational outcomes such as organizational performance (Andrews et al. 2009, Boyne 2001). The logic underlying this argument is that rational planning processes offer a counterweight to intuitive and political strategy development processes by generating an information-rich decision-making environment (Boyne 2001, Walker et al. 2010). More specifically, rational planning processes allow “decisions between alternative strategies to be taken logically on the basis of comprehensive information”, which, in turn, contributes to organizational outcomes (Boyne 2001, 76).

Building on the premise that rational planning processes, such as SP, are positively related to organizational outcomes (Andrews et al. 2009, Boyne 2001), the majority of empirical research on the subject has focused

on analyzing the relation between the adoption of a formal SP process and indicators of organizational performance (e.g. Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Walker et al. 2010).⁸ Although these studies provided crucial insights into SP's value, some caution has been expressed. Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson (2009, 174) for example, claim that rational planning theory reduces SP to "no more than a fairly rigid, mechanistically applied sequence of prescribed steps". Moreover, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards (2010) argue that research designs based on a rational, "mechanical" interpretation are not always able to capture the complexity of the relations between SP and management on the one hand and organizational outcomes on the other, and neglect the fact that different (interrelated) outcomes could result from strategic management processes.

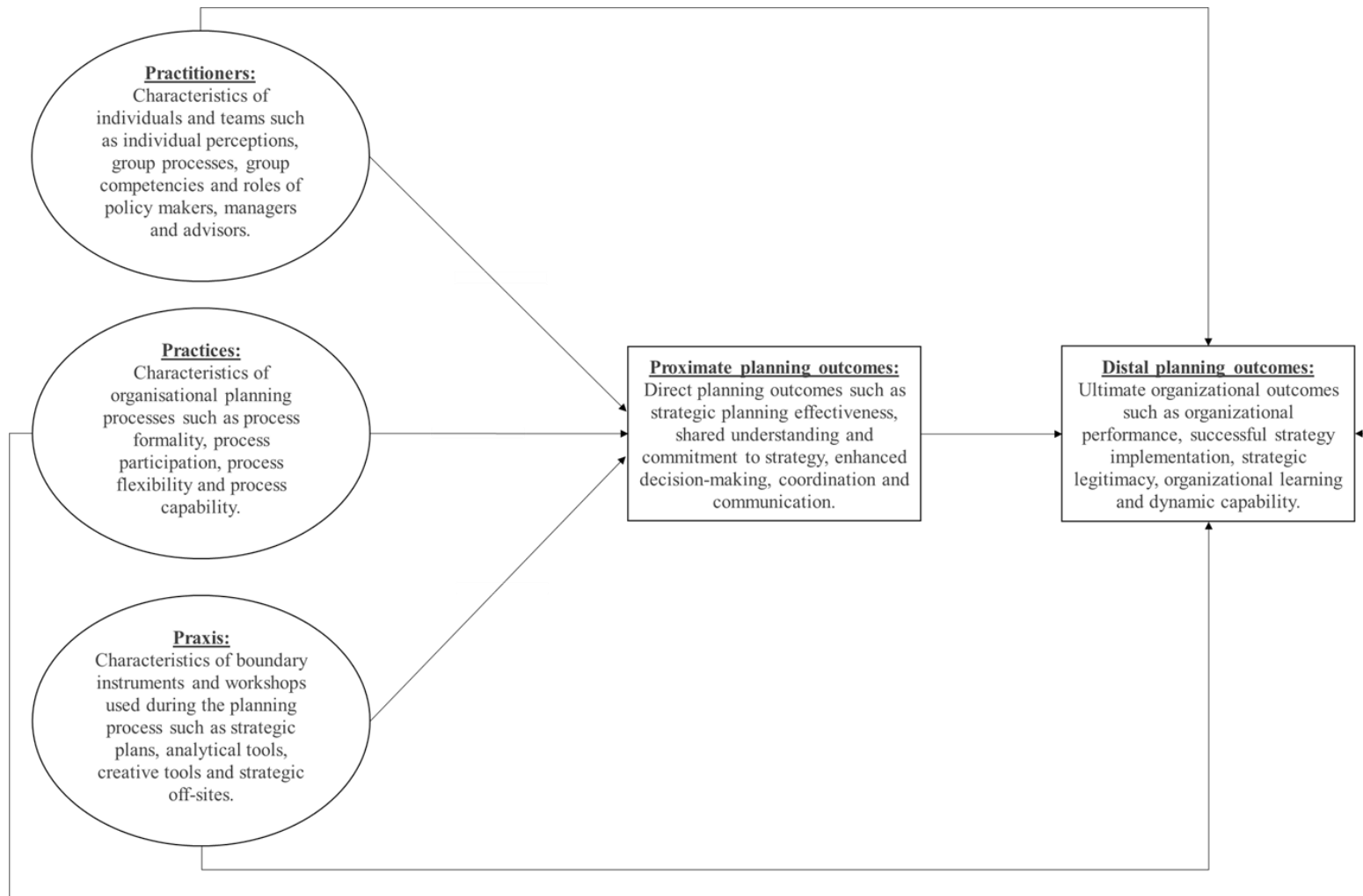
To help address these concerns, this study seeks to complement the existing rational planning literature by presenting a multidimensional perspective on SP and its outcomes. More specifically, to understand "how" SP is adopted by public organizations and what outcomes might ensue, we draw on the SAP paradigm (Vaara and Whittington 2012). SAP is considered an activity-based theory in strategic management scholarship. Specifically, SAP emerged as a response to the economic and rational approach to strategic management as something organizations "have" as opposed to something they "do" (Jarzabkowski 2005). This implies that economic and rational approaches are interested in the macro-level of strategic management, namely the strategic choices organizations make and how this relates to organizational performance, whereas SAP is interested not so much in the content of these choices but rather in how these choices actually emerge through the micro-level interactions between individuals, tools and processes (Jarzabkowski 2005, Vaara and Whittington 2012). This shift from the macro-level to the micro-level is particularly relevant for SP in public organizations because it is still "not clear how or why planning works" in a public sector context (Boyne 2001, 83). Additionally, because of the highly politicized context of public

⁸ Although some studies have used the term rational planning as a stand-alone process of strategy formulation (e.g. Andrews et al. 2009), for the purposes of this review we consider such studies as studies on formal strategic planning. Typically, both definitions focus on a rational approach to strategy formulation – including a scanning of the environment and a definition of strategic options/goals (e.g. Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013), and can thus be equated.

organizations, a focus on the micro-level interactions between individuals, tools and processes is particularly useful to understand the outcomes of SP in the public sector (Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010).

Figure 6 illustrates how SAP operationalizes the complex relation underlying SP and its outcomes through a multidimensional conceptual framework (Wolf and Floyd 2013). This framework is based on a recent literature review of management studies on SP and should thus be considered not as a research model for hypothesis testing but rather as “a scheme for organizing ideas in a way that helps” to connect contemporary strategic management research with public administration research (Wolf and Floyd 2013, 6).

Figure 6: Micro-activities and outcomes of strategic planning, adaption from Wolf and Floyd (2013)



Whereas rational planning theory would typically focus on the practice of process formality and its relation to the distal outcome of organizational performance (Andrews et al. 2009, Walker et al. 2010), SAP proposes a multidimensional perspective on both the constitutive elements of SP as well as the ensuing outcomes (Wolf and Floyd 2013). Figure 6 depicts that the micro-activities of SP processes consist of three distinct categories, namely the practitioners, practices and praxis of SP (i.e. the 3 P's of SP), while the outcomes of SP are divided into proximate and distal outcomes. The logic underlying Figure 6 is the following: The 3 P's of SP can contribute to both proximate and distal outcomes (i.e. main effects). Additionally, Figure 6 assumes that the proximate outcomes could help elucidate the relations between the 3 P's and distal outcomes (i.e. mediating effects). The building blocks of Figure 6 can be defined as follows (Wolf and Floyd 2013).

First, SAP distinguishes three types of micro-activities, namely SP's practitioners, SP's practices and SP's praxis (Jarzabkowski and Sillince 2007, Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009, Whittington 2006). The practitioners are "those who do the work of making, shaping and executing strategies" (Whittington 2006, 619). They include policy makers, senior executives, strategic planners, middle managers, outside strategy advisors, other external stakeholders and staff. More specifically, previous management studies on SP's practitioners have focused on how individual perceptions (e.g. perceived usefulness of the SP process), group processes (e.g. conflict during SP processes), group competencies (e.g. expertise of planning team), and different practitioner roles (e.g. top management support towards SP processes) impact SP's outcomes (Wolf and Floyd 2013). The practices are "shared routines of behavior, including traditions, norms and procedures for thinking, acting and using things" (Whittington 2006, 619). Based on previous management studies, this includes planning process formality (i.e. extent to which the SP process involves environmental scanning and strategic options/goals development), participation (i.e. extent to which the SP process involves internal and external stakeholders), flexibility (i.e. extent to which the SP process can be flexibly adapted to the context) and capability (i.e. extent to which the SP process is capable of gathering and analyzing relevant information for decision-making) (Wolf and Floyd 2013). The praxis is "actual activity, what people do in practice" (Whittington 2006, 619). Again drawing on the current management literature, this includes the usage of certain boundary documents and activities during SP such as analytical tools (e.g. benchmarking

and SWOT-analysis), creative tools (e.g. brainstorm sessions), the actual content of the strategic plans and the impact of strategy workshops or strategic off-sites (Wolf and Floyd 2013).

Second, to understand the relation between SP and organizational outcomes, SAP again presents a multidimensional approach (Vaara and Whittington 2012). This approach ties in well with the assumption that public management processes can result in both intermediate and ultimate outcomes, and understanding the sequential nature of these outcomes is critical for public management research (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). Specifically, the concept of organizational performance is expanded to both proximate and distal planning outcomes (Wolf and Floyd 2013). Proximate outcomes are direct planning outcomes that describe the “processual mechanisms that explain how SP influences organizational outcomes” (Wolf and Floyd 2013, 7). These outcomes are argued to act as mediators between SP and management on the one hand and distal outcomes on the other, and should thus be considered not as simple byproducts but as relevant measures of SP and management’s value to public organizations (George and Desmidt 2014, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010). Examples of such outcomes based on previous management research include enhanced decision-making, SP process effectiveness, integration and coordination of departments and operational activities, communication about strategic initiatives and shared understanding and commitment towards strategies (Wolf and Floyd 2013). Distal planning outcomes are the final products of the SP process and according to the management literature include successful strategy implementation, organizational learning, strategic legitimacy and dynamic capabilities alongside organizational performance (Wolf and Floyd 2013). Hence, understanding how SP influences distal outcomes remains a focal point within SAP, but by incorporating proximate outcomes as mediators SAP proposes a broader conception of SP’s value (George and Desmidt 2014, Vaara and Whittington 2012).

5.3. Methods

Because SP studies in public administration research have typically drawn on both qualitative and quantitative research designs, a statistical meta-analysis is not appropriate. Hence, we opted to employ a mixed research synthesis design in our review (Sandelowski et al. 2012). A mixed research synthesis includes (a) a data collection process based on a systematic literature review and (b) an integration of

research evidence drawn from both qualitative and quantitative studies - where findings confirmed by both types of studies are considered as mutually reinforcing, mixed research evidence.

DATA COLLECTION

A data collection process was developed with the aim of identifying research articles investigating the relations between the micro-activities and proximate and/or distal outcomes of SP in public organizations. To identify the relevant studies, the 46 journals listed in the public administration category of the Thompson Reuters Web of Science Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) were analyzed. The inclusion of these journals ensures that the selected articles adhere to basic theoretical and methodological expectations (Walker and Andrews 2015). Our keyword search included various Boolean combinations of the keywords planning or strategy formulation (i.e. to ensure a focus on SP).

The actual data collection process encompassed four phases. First, in late 2015 we searched the 46 journals for articles that included our search terms. This resulted in 2.404 articles. Second, these articles were exported into the bibliographic software Endnote. Via Endnote, the selected articles were analyzed both on title, keywords and abstract with the intention of excluding irrelevant citations (Thorpe et al. 2005), of which examples included for instance articles on pension planning (e.g. Frank, Gianakis, and Neshkova 2012). This process led to the removal of 2.254 articles. Third, the remaining 150 articles were analyzed to determine if the studies reported original findings based on a qualitative or quantitative research design that focuses on the relations between micro-activities and outcomes of SP. Many articles did not meet this criteria because these focused on antecedents of SP (e.g. Berry 1994), did not present original findings (e.g. Streib and Poister 1990) or did not address SP (e.g. Meier et al. 2007). This resulted in 40 relevant articles. Fourth, to control for comprehensiveness we scanned the references of the selected articles, and two recent reviews (Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010) to ensure that no studies were omitted: none were. An overview of the selected research articles, sample, country, research design and research context is presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Selected articles and research design

Study	Sample	Country	Methods	Context
Eadie and Steinbacher (1985)	1	US	Single case study	Ohio Bureau of Employment Services
Bryson and Roering (1988)	8	US	Multi case study	Twin Cities area of Minnesota
Poister and Streib (1989)	451	US	Single-informant survey	Municipalities (population: 25,000 to 1 million)
Miesing and Andersen (1991)	40	US	Single-informant survey	New York State Agencies
Barkdoll (1992)	1	US	Single case study	US Food and Drug Administration
Bruton and Hildreth (1993)	45	US	Single-informant survey	Public organizations
Kemp, Funk, and Eadie (1993)	1	US	Single case study	US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Wheeland (1993)	1	US	Single case study	City of Rock Hill, South Carolina
Roberts and Wargo (1994)	1	US	Single case study	US Navy
Berry and Wechsler (1995)	548	US	Single-informant survey	Directors of state agencies
Kissler et al. (1998)	1	US	Single case study	State of Oregon
Van Breda (2000)	29	SA	Single-informant survey	Social workers
Donald, Lyons, and Tribbey (2001)	1	US	Single case study	Louisville Water Company
Franklin (2001)	14	US	Textual analysis / interviews	Federal, department-level agencies
Campbell (2002)	1	US	Single case study	U.S. Air Force
Kim (2002)	24	US	Multi-informant survey	Clark County Nevada
Poister and Van Slyke (2002)	21	US	Textual analysis / interviews	State Departments of Transportation
Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003)	70	UK	Textual analysis / Multi-informant survey	Welsh Best Value pilot services

Study	Sample	Country	Methods	Context
Hendrick (2003)	14	US	Single-informant survey	City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Wheeland (2003)	1	US	Single case study	City of Rock Hill, South Carolina
Long and Franklin (2004)	14	US	Interviews	Federal cabinet-level departments
Poister and Streib (2005)	512	US	Single-informant survey	Municipalities (population: 25,000 or more)
Korosec (2006)	202	US	Single-informant survey	Cities (population: greater than 50,000)
Walker and Boyne (2006)	117	UK	Multi-informant survey / secondary data	Upper tier English local authorities
Boyne and Chen (2007)	147	UK	Panel data	English local education authorities
Hintea (2008)	1	RO	Single case study	City of Cluj-Napoca
Andrews et al. (2009)	47	UK	Multi-informant survey / secondary data	Service departments in Welsh local government
Harris, Dopson, and Fitzpatrick (2009)	2	US/UK	Dual case study	Humanity USA and Humanity International UK
Milutinovic and Jolovic (2010)	1	Balkan	Single case study	Drina River Basin
Walker et al. (2010)	69	UK	Multi-informant survey / secondary data	English local authorities
Guimaraes et al. (2011)	1	Brazil	Single case study	Brazilian Superior Tribunal of Justice
Kapucu, Volkov, and Wang (2011)	18	US	Multi case study	Florida Sterling Council Award winners
Kelman and Myers (2011)	17	US	Interviews / secondary data	Public sector executives
McHatton et al. (2011)	1	US	Single case study	Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)	54	US	Single-informant survey	US Public Transit Systems

Study	Sample	Country	Methods	Context
Mosley et al. (2012)	667/ 278	US	Longitudinal single-informant surveys	Human service nonprofits in Los Angeles County
Jimenez (2013)	1,100	US	Single-informant survey	Municipal governments
Jung and Lee (2013)	36	US	Multi-informant survey	US government agencies
Poister, Pasha, and Edwards (2013)	88	US	Single-informant survey / secondary data	Urban public transit agencies
Alonso (2014)	1	Spain	Single case study	A Spanish city government

The identified studies cover a range of almost 30 years of research on SP in public organizations. First, the number of articles is quite stable throughout the years indicating that research on SP is enduring. Second, the majority of articles draw on data collected in the United States (30) while six studies use data collected in the United Kingdom. South-Africa, Romania, the Balkan Countries, Brazil and Spain were also subjected to one study each. Third, a variety of research methods have been applied. Single case studies (14) and single-informant surveys (11) are most frequently adopted. Research methods such as multi-informant surveys, multi-case studies, interviews and panel data are less recurrent. Experimental designs are completely absent. Fourth, the dominant unit of analysis are local governments including municipalities, cities and other local authorities (15) while the remainder of the articles focus on a variety of public sector contexts, ranging from human service nonprofits to public transit agencies.

DATA ANALYSIS

IDENTIFYING RESEARCH FOCUS. To identify whether articles focus on the practitioners, practices and/or praxis of SP in relation to proximate and/or distal outcomes a two-stage decision process was adopted. The goal of this process was to ensure that each investigated relation in the identified 40 studies was assigned to the relevant elements of our SAP framework and potential gaps could be identified. First, we made an inventory of all relevant relations analyzed in the identified articles. In the case of quantitative studies, this implies the relations between micro-activities and outcomes of SP for which the study aimed to produce statistical evidence (i.e. correlations, regression coefficients or descriptive data). In the case of qualitative studies these relations were designated by the original author(s) in their conclusion as key findings of the study. Second, for each identified relation, we assigned the independent variable to its corresponding micro-activity (i.e. the sub dimensions underlying the practitioners, practices and praxis categories as identified in management studies) as well as the dependent variable to its corresponding outcome (i.e. the sub dimensions underlying the proximate and distal outcome categories as identified in management studies).

INTEGRATING RESEARCH FINDINGS. The range of qualitative and quantitative research designs in our sample led us to employ the relationship table integration technique. This technique is an integrated design

approach to mixed research synthesis, which implies that “the methodological differences between qualitative and quantitative studies are minimized as both kinds of studies are viewed as producing findings that can readily be transformed into each other” (Sandelowski, Voils, and Barroso 2006, 29). Specifically, we group the findings of the studies not by research design but by the extent to which these studies address the same relation. As such, we transform the findings of both qualitative and quantitative studies into countable relations that can then be aggregated (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie 2003). The relationship table technique thus allows a balanced integration of qualitative and quantitative research findings because the focus lies on the actual relation presented by a study, irrespective of the study’s sample, as opposed to a weighted approach that is contingent on sample size. In line with our mixed research synthesis, our main goal is thus to offer mixed research evidence where qualitative and quantitative findings are evenly balanced and act as mutually reinforcing. Specifically, the relationship table centers on the direction of a relation and the number of times a relation has been cited, irrespective of whether the relation is supported by statistical evidence or qualitative evidence.

The construction of the relationship table involved two steps. First, we categorize the identified micro-activity at the lowest level possible, as the author(s) described it. Some micro-activities were mentioned by several authors (e.g. practitioners – support from top management to the SP process), other micro-activities were only mentioned by one author in a specific context (e.g. practices - participation of city mayor during the SP process). Second, drawing on the theoretical model presented earlier, the relations between the specific micro-activity and proximate and/or distal outcomes were assessed. Relations could be either positive (+), negative (-) or neutral (0). Where possible, relations were summated in order to identify for which micro-activity integrated evidence could be uncovered thereby permitting aggregate statements, and ideally mixed research evidence, about the impact of SP’s micro-activities on outcomes. Two of the authors coded the relations independently, and results were then discussed in order to ensure, as much as possible, an objective coding process based on the earlier defined scope statement.

5.4. Results

Table 16 presents the research focus of the 40 identified articles operationalized within the defined theoretical framework (i.e. the 3 P's of SP as independent variables and the proximate and distal outcomes of SP as dependent variables).

Table 16: Research focus concerning micro-activities and outcomes of SP

Study	Micro-activities			Outcomes	
	Practitioners	Practices	Praxis	Proximate outcomes	Distal outcomes
Eadie and Steinbacher (1985)	Competencies	X	X	Coordination	X
Bryson and Roering (1988)	Roles	X	X	Process effectiveness	X
Poister and Streib (1989)	X	Formality	X	Process effectiveness	X
Miesing and Andersen (1991)	Perceptions	Formality	X	Understanding	X
Barkdoll (1992)	X	Formality	X	Process effectiveness	X
Bruton and Hildreth (1993)	Competencies	X	X	Understanding	X
Kemp, Funk, and Eadie (1993)	Roles	Formality / Participation	X	Process effectiveness	X
Wheeland (1993)	Roles	Formality / Participation	X	X	Strategic legitimacy
Roberts and Wargo (1994)	X	Formality	X	Process effectiveness	X
Berry and Wechsler (1995)	X	Formality	X	Process effectiveness / Decision-making /	Strategic legitimacy / Performance
Kissler et al. (1998)	Roles	Participation	Tools	X	Strategic legitimacy
Van Breda (2000)	X	Participation	X	X	Strategic legitimacy / Performance
Donald, Lyons, and Tribbey (2001)	Roles	Formality / Participation	X	X	Strategic legitimacy
Franklin (2001)	X	Participation	X	X	Strategic legitimacy
Campbell (2002)	Roles	Participation	X	Process effectiveness	X

Study	Micro-activities			Outcomes	
	Practitioners	Practices	Praxis	Proximate outcomes	Distal outcomes
Kim (2002)	X	Participation	X	X	Strategic legitimacy
Poister and Van Slyke (2002)	Perceptions	Formality / Participation	X	Process effectiveness	X
Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003)	Perceptions	Formality	X	X	Performance
Hendrick (2003)	Roles	Formality / Participation	X	Process effectiveness / Coordination / Communication	X
Wheeland (2003)	Roles	Participation	X	X	Implementation
Long and Franklin (2004)	Group process	Participation	X	Process effectiveness	X
Poister and Streib (2005)	X	Formality / Participation	X	Process effectiveness / Decision-making / Coordination	Performance / Implementation / Strategic legitimacy
Korosec (2006)	Competencies / Roles / Group process	Formality	X	Understanding	X
Walker and Boyne (2006)	Group process	Formality	X	X	Performance
Boyne and Chen (2007)	X	Formality	X	X	Performance
Hintea (2008)	X	Participation	X	Process effectiveness	X
Andrews et al. (2009)	X	Formality	X	X	Performance
Harris, Dopson, and Fitzpatrick (2009)	X	Formality	X	Understanding	Strategic legitimacy
Milutinovic and Jolovic (2010)	Competencies	Participation	X	Process effectiveness	X

	Micro-activities			Outcomes	
Study	Practitioners	Practices	Praxis	Proximate outcomes	Distal outcomes
Walker et al. (2010)	X	Formality	X	X	Performance
Guimaraes et al. (2011)	X	Formality	X	Process effectiveness	X
Kapucu, Volkov, and Wang (2011)	X	Formality	X	X	Strategic legitimacy
Kelman and Myers (2011)	X	Formality	X	X	Strategic legitimacy
McHatton et al. (2011)	X	X	Tools	Process effectiveness	X
Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)	Roles / Perceptions	Formality / Participation	Strategic plan	Process effectiveness	X
Mosley et al. (2012)	X	Formality	X	X	Dynamic capability
Jimenez (2013)	X	Formality	X	X	Performance
Jung and Lee (2013)	X	Formality	X	X	Performance
Poister, Pasha, and Edwards (2013)	X	Formality	X	X	Performance
Alonso (2014)	Roles	Participation	Strategic plan	Process effectiveness	Learning / Strategic legitimacy
Total number of articles:	19	36	4	22	22

MICRO-ACTIVITIES

Table 16 indicates that the practitioners of SP were the subject of 19 studies. More specifically, all practitioner sub dimensions listed in the theoretical framework were, albeit with different frequency, analyzed. The practitioner sub dimension most discussed was practitioner roles (11 studies). Examples include the presence of a process sponsor (e.g. Campbell 2002), the involvement of an external consultant (e.g. Kissler et al. 1998) and support from top management to the SP process (e.g. Korosec 2006). Alongside this, articles also analyzed the importance of individual perceptions (4 studies) such as perceived simplicity of the SP process (e.g. Miesing and Andersen 1991), group processes (3 studies) such as perceived conflict during SP (Korosec 2006), and group competencies (4 studies) such as expertise in SP (e.g. Milutinovic and Jolovic 2010).

The practices underlying SP were the subject of 36 studies, and include process formality (26 studies) and process participation (17 studies). Process formality, or related terms such as rationality and comprehensiveness, typically assesses the extent to which the SP process adheres to specific process elements of environmental scanning and strategic option development (Andrews et al. 2009, Boyne 2001). While some articles focus on a specific element within process formality, for instance setting targets or conducting an internal analysis (e.g. Boyne and Chen 2007, Poister and Streib 2005), most articles use a composite (e.g. Walker et al. 2010) or single-item (e.g. Poister and Streib 1989) variable to measure the presence and/or the degree of formality of the SP process. Some elements that are typically included in measures of process formality are: internal and external analysis of the environment, developing strategic priorities, defining goals, developing action plans and setting targets (e.g. Boyne and Gould-Williams 2003, Kelman and Myers 2011).

Process participation includes both internal participation (10 studies) and external participation (13 studies). Most authors focused on internal participation or external participation as a composite variable (e.g. Hendrick 2003), whereas others focused on the participation of very specific stakeholders such as department heads (e.g. Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann 2011) or labor unions (Donald, Lyons, and Tribbey 2001).

The praxis of SP was least studied: the role of the strategic plan and analytical tools were subject of four studies. One study focused on benchmarking as a strategy tool during SP (Kissler et al. 1998), one study focused on specific surveying techniques as a strategy tool to gather information during SP (McHatton et al. 2011), while two studies discussed the role of the actual formal strategic plan (Alonso 2014, Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann 2011).

OUTCOMES

Twenty-two studies focused on analyzing proximate planning outcomes while 22 studies examined distal outcomes, of which 4 examined both outcomes. With respect to the proximate outcomes of SP, following sub dimensions were the subject of analysis: process effectiveness (17 studies), shared understanding and commitment to strategy (4 studies), enhanced decision-making (2 studies), coordination (3 studies) and communication (1 study). Process effectiveness assesses the extent to which the SP process actually delivers expected output (e.g. help to clarify priorities, help to assess weaknesses) or was deemed as being effective by process actors or researchers. Process effectiveness was measured by using single-item variables such as “rate the effectiveness of strategic planning” (e.g. Poister and Streib 1989), composite variables (e.g. Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann 2011) and researcher assessment (e.g. Poister and Van Slyke 2002). Shared understanding and commitment to strategy analyzes the extent to which individuals or groups within the organization understand the importance and role of the defined strategies and support these. For instance, Korosec (2006) used a one-item variable to measure whether strategies are well supported by departments within city administrations. Similarly, Miesing and Andersen (1991) analyzed the degree of consensus within an organization regarding the formulated strategies.

Studies analyzing distal planning outcomes focused on organizational performance (11 studies), strategic legitimacy (12 studies), successful strategy implementation (2 studies) and organizational learning or dynamic capability (2 studies). First, organizational performance includes both external archival data and internal perceptual data. For instance, both Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003) and Jung and Lee (2013) measured organizational performance as an internal perceptual variable (i.e. gathered through survey data with multiple informants in an organization). Others, such as Boyne and Chen (2007) and Poister, Pasha,

and Edwards (2013), measured organizational performance through external archival data drawn from secondary databases (e.g. performance data drawn the National Transit Database). Second, strategic legitimacy refers to the degree of credibility of a public organization as perceived by its stakeholders. Operationalizations include: awards received by professional organizations for being exemplary in a specific area (e.g. Wheeland 1993), sustainable relations with labor unions (Donald, Lyons, and Tribbey 2001), and employee satisfaction (e.g. Kim 2002). Third, successful strategy implementation indicates the extent to which strategies are actually realized in the public organization. For instance, Wheeland (2003) assesses determinants of the likelihood of successful implementation of strategic plans in his case study. Organizational learning and dynamic capability, finally, assess the extent to which public organizations learn from their environment through SP and adapt accordingly (e.g. Mosley et al. 2012).

Finally, the 4 studies that focus on both proximate and distal planning outcomes include for instance Poister and Streib's (2005) operationalization of the impact of SP. This aggregated, multi-item scale variable incorporates measures of process effectiveness, enhanced decision-making, enhanced coordination, strategic legitimacy and organizational performance without explicitly distinguishing between proximate or distal outcomes.

RELATIONS BETWEEN MICRO-ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

In total, we identified 93 positive, 37 neutral and 6 negative relations between micro-activities and outcomes of SP. Of these 23% focus on the relations between practitioners and outcomes of SP, 74% on the relations between practices and outcomes of SP, and 3% on the relations between praxis and outcomes of SP. All relations are independent effects as no joint effects models were uncovered in the identified articles.

First, we discuss the relations between practitioners and outcomes of SP. Table 17 indicates that overall top management support to the SP process has in the majority of identified relations (4 of 5) been found to contribute to proximate and distal outcomes. Moreover, both qualitative (e.g. Donald, Lyons, and Tribbey 2001) and quantitative (e.g. Korosec 2006) studies support the 4 identified positive relations between top management support and SP's outcomes. Apart from top management support, expertise in SP has also

been identified (3 positive relations) as a contributive element to proximate planning outcomes in both qualitative studies (e.g. Eadie and Steinbacher 1985) and a quantitative study (Korosec 2006). We also uncover integrated evidence (5 positive relations) from 5 qualitative studies (e.g. Kissler et al. 1998) on the contribution of including external consultants during SP to proximate and distal outcomes. Other micro-activities in the practitioner category (e.g. process champion, perceived ownership) are also identified to contribute to SP's outcomes but on a less frequent basis and/or based on evidence from one research method.

Table 17: Relations between practitioners and outcomes of SP

Micro-activities		Proximate			Distal			Study
		+	0	-	+	0	-	
Practitioner roles	Process champion	1	/	/	2	/	/	Bryson and Roering (1988); Wheeland (1993); Wheeland (2003)
	Process sponsor	2	/	/	1	/	/	Bryson and Roering (1988); Campbell (2002); Wheeland (2003)
	Overall top management support	2	/	1	2	/	/	Kemp, Funk, and Eadie (1993); Wheeland (1993); Donald, Lyons, and Tribbey (2001); Hendrick (2003); Korosec (2006); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Support from policy and administration	2	/	/	/	/	/	Campbell (2002); Alonso (2014)
	Organization-wide support for planning	1	/	/	/	/	/	Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Presence of external consultant	2	/	/	3	/	/	Bryson and Roering (1988); Kemp, Funk, and Eadie (1993); Wheeland (1993); Kissler et al. (1998); Wheeland (2003)
Perceptions	Perceived simplicity of process	2	/	/	/	/	/	Miesing and Andersen (1991); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Perceived client-orientation of process	1	/	/	/	/	/	Poister and Van Slyke (2002)
	Perceived effectiveness of environmental analyses	/	/	/	1	/	/	Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003)
	Perceived fairness of process	/	1	/	/	/	/	Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
Group process	Perceived conflict	1	/	/	/	/	/	Korosec (2006)
	Perceived ownership of goals/targets	/	/	/	1	/	/	Walker and Boyne (2006)
	Perceived unique challenges	1	/	/	/	/	/	Long and Franklin (2004)
Competencies	External orientation	1	/	/	/	/	/	Bruton and Hildreth (1993)
	Expertise	3	/	/	/	/	/	Eadie and Steinbacher (1985); Korosec (2006); Milutinovic and Jolovic (2010)
Summary of identified practitioners relations		19	1	1	10	0	0	

Second, we discuss the relations between practices and outcomes of SP. Table 18 indicates that the adoption of a formal and comprehensive SP process has in the majority of identified relations (17 of 21) been found to be positively related to proximate and distal outcomes. In line with rational planning theory, our findings thus suggest that the adoption of a formal SP process contributes to positive outcomes. Moreover, this positive relation is supported by both qualitative (e.g. Kapucu, Volkov, and Wang 2011) and quantitative (e.g. Jung and Lee 2013) studies. In addition, Table 18 also provides insights into the possible beneficial components of such a formal and comprehensive SP process. More specifically, the following components are positively associated with outcomes on more occasions than a neutral or negative association: defining upfront SP guidelines (2 positive relations), conducting an environmental analysis (1 positive relation), defining a vision for the future (3 positive relations), setting clear realistic goals (3 positive relations), executing a feasibility assessment of proposed strategies (2 positive relations) and developing action plans (4 positive relations).

Table 18: Relations between practices and outcomes of SP

	Micro-activities	Proximate			Distal			Study
		+	0	-	+	0	-	
Formality	Adoption of a formal and comprehensive strategic planning process	8	/	/	9	4	/	Poister and Streib (1989); Miesing and Andersen (1991); Berry and Wechsler (1995); Hendrick (2003); Poister and Streib (2005); Andrews et al. (2009); Harris, Dopson, and Fitzpatrick (2009); Walker et al. (2010); Guimaraes et al. (2011); Kapucu, Volkov, and Wang (2011); Kelman and Myers (2011); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011); Mosley et al. (2012); Jimenez (2013); Jung and Lee (2013); Poister, Pasha, and Edwards (2013)
	Upfront strategic planning guidelines	2	/	/	/	/	/	Kemp, Funk, and Eadie (1993); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Clarification of organizational mandates	/	1	/	/	1	/	Poister and Streib (2005)
	Environmental analysis	/	/	/	1	/	/	Kelman and Myers (2011)
	Internal analysis	/	2	/	/	2	/	Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003); Poister and Streib (2005); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	External analysis	/	1	/	/	2	/	Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003); Poister and Streib (2005)
	Vision for the future	2	1	/	1	1	/	Barkdoll (1992); Wheeland (1993); Poister and Streib (2005); Korosec (2006)
	Organizational mission	/	1	/	/	1	/	Poister and Streib (2005)
	Strategic priorities / agenda	2	1	/	/	1	/	Roberts and Wargo (1994); Poister and Streib (2005); Korosec (2006)
	Identification of stakeholders' needs and concerns	1	1	/	/	1	/	Poister and Streib (2005); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Setting clear, realistic goals and objectives	1	1	/	2	1	/	Donald, Lyons, and Tribbey (2001); Poister and Streib (2005); Kelman and Myers (2011); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Number of goals	/	/	/	/	/	1	Kelman and Myers (2011)
	Feasibility assessment	1	/	/	1	/	/	Poister and Streib (2005)
	Developing action plans	2	1	/	2	1	/	Poister and Van Slyke (2002); Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003); Poister and Streib (2005); Kelman and Myers (2011); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Target setting	/	/	/	1	/	1	Walker and Boyne (2006); Boyne and Chen (2007)
	Ambition of targets	/	/	/	/	1	/	Boyne and Chen (2007)
	Number of targets	/	/	/	1	/	1	Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003); Boyne and Chen (2007)

Micro-activities		Proximate			Distal			Study
		+	0	-	+	0	-	
Participation (int.)	Degree of internal participation	4	1	1	2	/	/	Kemp, Funk, and Eadie (1993); Franklin (2001); Kim (2002); Poister and Van Slyke (2002); Hendrick (2003); Long and Franklin (2004); Alonso (2014)
	Mayor	/	1	/	/	1	/	Poister and Streib (2005)
	City council	/	1	/	/	1	/	Poister and Streib (2005)
	City manager or chief administrative officer	/	1	/	/	1	/	Poister and Streib (2005)
	Department heads and other senior managers	1	1	/	1	/	/	Poister and Streib (2005); Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Boundaries for unit managers' participation	1	/	/	/	/	/	Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011)
	Lower-level employees	1	/	/	2	/	/	Van Breda (2000); Poister and Streib (2005)
Participation (ext.)	Degree of external participation	6	1	1	5	/	/	Wheeland (1993); Kissler et al. (1998); Franklin (2001); Campbell (2002); Poister and Van Slyke (2002); Hendrick (2003); Wheeland (2003); Long and Franklin (2004); Poister and Streib (2005); Hintea (2008); Milutinovic and Jolovic (2010); Alonso (2014)
	Labor unions	/	/	/	1	/	/	Donald, Lyons, and Tribbey (2001)
Summary of identified practices relations		32	16	2	29	19	3	

Table 18 also indicates that the degree of stakeholder participation during SP has in the majority of identified relations (17 of 21) been found to contribute to proximate and distal outcomes. Moreover, said positive relations are supported by both qualitative (e.g. Alonso 2014) and quantitative (e.g. Poister and Streib 2005) studies. More positive relations were identified for the degree of external participation (11 positive relations) than for the degree of internal participation (6 positive relations). Additionally, Table 18 provides insights into potential beneficial stakeholder groups, which include department heads and senior managers (2 positive relations), lower-level employees (3 positive relations) and labor unions (1 positive relation).

Third, we investigate the relations between the praxis and outcomes of SP. Only four articles examine said relations. As these articles focus on different sub dimensions of the praxis of SP or present different results, integrating the research findings was not an option. More specifically, Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann (2011) found one neutral relation between the presence of a formal strategic plan and proximate outcomes. Conflictingly, Alonso (2014) argued that the strategic plan is an important educational instrument, which illustrates the position of stakeholders within the city. Finally, Kissler et al. (1998) presented one positive relation between the strategy tool benchmarking and distal outcomes whereas McHatton et al. (2011) argued the importance of survey tools, such as a board survey or a survey of online members, in order to execute an effective SP process.

5.5. Discussion

This review contributes to public administration scholarship by addressing the calls for more insights into the complex relation between SP and organizational outcomes, and integration of evidence regarding SP's contribution to public organizations (Boyne 2001, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010). In response to these calls a theoretical framework was introduced (Wolf and Floyd 2013), which builds on the SAP paradigm. This framework complements rational planning theory—the dominate framework in public administration research on the subject—by introducing a multidimensional and micro-level perspective on SP and its outcomes. The mixed research synthesis we conducted identified 40 public administration articles on micro-activities and outcomes of SP and integrated the research findings. The main findings from our study are

that the adoption of a formal SP process, the support offered by top management to the SP process and the participation of stakeholders during the SP process contribute to positive outcomes. The results of our review have several implications for public administration research and theory.

This review introduced a novel theoretical approach to SP research based on SAP, which is an activity-based theory within the strategic management field (Jarzabkowski 2005). Whereas rational planning theory typically offers a macro-level perspective on the SP process and its relation with organizational performance, SAP presents a micro-level perspective by focusing on the practitioners, practices and praxis of SP processes. Additionally, SAP broadens the concept of organizational performance through a multidimensional outcome model where the 3P's of SP are related to distal planning outcomes (e.g. organizational performance) through a set of proximate planning outcomes (e.g. enhanced decision-making). Hence, by focusing on "how" SP is actually conducted in practice by practitioners, SAP could help to strengthen the relation "between those who conduct research and those who might implement research findings" (Charlier, Brown, and Rynes 2011, 222).

The findings of the integration study support rational planning theory (Andrews et al. 2009, Boyne 2001, Elbanna 2006), but also indicate the need for a SAP approach to research on SP in public organizations. More specifically, the balance of the evidence points towards positive relations between the adoption of a formal SP process and positive outcomes as argued by rational planning theory. Hence, our study ties in with recent studies which indicate that the adoption of SP is beneficial to public organizations (e.g. George and Desmidt 2014, Walker and Andrews 2015). However, based on the integration of evidence two additional contributive micro-activities of SP were identified, which are not necessarily incorporated by rational planning theory, namely stakeholder participation during the SP process and top management support towards the SP process.

The importance of stakeholder participation during SP is in line with the propositions of the service-dominant approach to public-sector service delivery (Osborne, Radnor, and Nasi 2013). More specifically, SP is typically a process of strategic orientation, which implies the search for a fit between the expectations of service users (e.g. citizens) and the internal capacity of public organizations (e.g. resources) (Bryson,

Berry, and Yang 2010, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010). Hence, through stakeholder participation during SP, the planning process actually “generates basic information about current and future needs that can then support policy formulation and implementation” (Osborne, Radnor, and Nasi 2013, 142). Our findings thus support integrative stakeholder participation as a constitutive element of SP because it injects service-relevant information on the environment of public organizations into the strategy development process (Hendrick 2003), which in turn contributes to positive outcomes (e.g. Poister and Streib 2005). Moreover, within the service-dominant approach to public-sector service delivery, it is exactly said integrative stakeholder participation during SP that addresses the uniqueness of public administration theory as opposed to theories drawn from evidence in manufacturing firms (Osborne, Radnor, and Nasi 2013). Conclusively, our integrative and mixed research evidence on the importance of stakeholder participation during SP in public organizations supports the claim of Albrechts (2013) for the necessity of a coproduction perspective on SP in the public sector – where strategic plans are developed in partnership with stakeholders to ensure their needs are met. A range of stakeholder analysis techniques should thus be incorporated as constitutive elements of the SP process of public organizations, inspiration for which can be drawn from, for instance, Bryson (2004).

The contribution of top management support towards the SP process ties in with calls for more internal alignment of public management processes (Andrews et al. 2012). Typically, SP requires a large amount of time, dedication and resources from top management (Boyne 2001). Hence, in order for SP to be effective “it must fit the management style of the organization” (Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann 2011, 110). If a misfit occurs, SP could lose the support of top management, which, based on our findings, will undoubtedly inhibit SP’s contribution to public organizations (e.g. Korosec 2006). It is thus crucial to avoid a misfit, and the resulting lack of support from top management, through recurrent discussion and adaption of the proposed strategic plan with top management, and by ensuring that top management engages actively in the SP process (Ugboro, Obeng, and Spann 2011). Additionally, top management support implies that SP is not only a compliance exercise in order to meet the requirements of legislation but a strategic exercise fully supported by top management (Taylor 2011).

FURTHER RESEARCH

Although research on SP in public organizations has spanned over 30 years, the bulk of evidence is based on single case studies, single-informant surveys and, typically, discusses evidence from the US and/or local governments. Additionally, studies focused on elements of process formality or process participation when investigating SP's effectiveness in a public-sector setting. Our summary categorization thus allows us to make integrative statements about the importance of a formal and participatory SP process in local governments and US-based public organizations, but does not allow generalization towards other country contexts and/or different levels of government. We simply need more studies on the topic in non-US settings and across government levels in order to provide such generalizations. Moreover, during the coding of the 40 articles, it became apparent that these studies often lack a strong connection. Although addressing similar themes, the employed scales for instance differed strongly – and scales were rarely reproduced in different settings by different authors. As a field, we would benefit largely from reproducible scales that capture the key dimensions of SP processes in public organizations and that allow us to test SP's effectiveness in different public-sector contexts. Future research should take into account these recommendations and explicitly build on previous scales and studies to ensure integration of evidence through meta-analysis.

Based on the identified research focus as well as the current empirical insights drawn from the strategic management literature (Wolf and Floyd 2013), several theoretical avenues for public administration research also remain. First, although all elements of the practitioner categories were investigated, most of these elements were scrutinized by only one or two studies. Hence, future research could further address the defined practitioner elements to elucidate the importance of the individuals involved in the SP process. This recommended focus on the practitioners of SP can tie in with the emergence of Behavioral Public Administration (Tummers et al. 2016). Through the usage of theories from psychology and organizational behavior, as well as experimental research methods, authors could help elucidate how public managers and/or politicians behave during SP and how their behavior can impact SP's outcomes (Tummers et al. 2016). Second, scholars could focus on the practices of process flexibility and process capability (Wolf and Floyd 2013). Typically, a flexible planning process is assumed to generate benefits in dynamic and complex

environments because it offers a framework for adaptation and strategic change (Barringer and Bluedorn 1999, Grant 2003). Public-sector contexts might be identified in which a flexible SP process is more adequate than a highly-formalized SP process. Additionally, capability-based authors argue that SP is not just an exercise of making plans and devising targets, it is an information-processing capability of organizations (Ramanujam, Venkatraman, and Camillus 1986, Rogers, Miller, and Judge 1999). Focusing on the extent to which the SP process actually collects and analyzes relevant information for decision-making could further our understanding of SP's value to public organizations. Third, public administration research has so far attributed limited attention towards the praxis of SP. Conflictingly, Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson (2009, 202) argue that objects such as analytical and creative tools are central to a SP process as these "help participants make sense of their world". How these tools enable or constrain SP is however largely uncharted terrain.

Some avenues can also be discerned for the outcomes of SP. First, although the proximate outcomes of enhanced decision-making, improved coordination and communication have been attributed to SP, research evidence supporting this claim is scarce. We argue that especially the lack of insights into the decision-making impact of SP could be troublesome. More specifically, SP is assumed to inject information into public sector decision-making, thus offering a counterweight for intuition-based or politically-motivated decisions (Boyne 2001, Walker et al. 2010). Hence, proponents of SP consider it a rational approach to organizational decision-making that should contribute to proximate decision-making outcomes such as decision quality, decision commitment and decision effectiveness (Elbanna 2006, Elbanna and Child 2007). Second, while the distal outcomes of organizational performance and strategic legitimacy have received their share of attention, the contribution of SP to organizational learning and dynamic capability has not yet been assessed (Wolf and Floyd 2013). From a resource-based view, these two distal outcomes are related to the perspective that SP is a capability of an organization (Ramanujam, Venkatraman, and Camillus 1986). More specifically, organizations can use SP to learn about their environment, seize opportunities and adapt organizational processes and organizational skills accordingly (Teece 2007). Hence, SP in itself becomes a capability that allows the organization to quickly adapt to and learn from a changing environment (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000). These outcomes are particularly relevant in public

organizations because concepts of “strategic capability and learning” in governments (i.e. the “strategic state”) are gaining importance with both practitioners and academics (Joyce and Drumaux 2014). Finally, although SAP conceptualizes the outcomes of SP through a mediated model, public administration research has typically focused on either the main effects between micro-activities and proximate outcomes of SP or the main effects between micro-activities and distal outcomes of SP. Nevertheless, public administration scholars such as Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) and Poister, Pitts, and Edwards (2010) have argued that distal outcomes of public management processes such as organizational performance are not necessarily the direct result of said processes but are instead the result of a complex chain that includes process outputs and intermediate outcomes. Hence, future research could aim to elucidate this chain for the specific case of SP by constructing mediated models in which proximate outcomes mediate SP’s relation with distal outcomes.

5.6. Limitations

Despite providing insights into the relations between micro-activities and outcomes of SP, some limitations of our study need to be taken into account. First, a common default in systematic literature reviews is the “file drawer problem” (Rosenthal 1979). Excluding unpublished studies introduces a bias concerning the actual number and directions of cited relations because null findings are typically not published (Walker and Andrews 2015). Second, the incorporated articles almost exclusively focus on a US public sector-setting. The generalizability of the findings to other country contexts could thus be limited. Third, no distinction was used between methodologies. Hence, findings based on case studies, single-informant surveys and multi-informant surveys were integrated without distinguishing between the sources they came from.

5.7. Conclusion

SP has been an area of public administration research for over 30 years. This study shows that the academic quest to understand “how” public organizations can benefit from SP is still ongoing. To offer direction to this quest, we presented a SAP based model of the micro-activities and outcomes of SP and identified fruitful research avenues. The balance of research evidence so far supports rational planning theorists who

argue that a formal SP process contributes to positive outcomes for public organizations. However, the micro-activities of stakeholder participation during SP and top management support towards SP, which are typically not incorporated by rational planning theory but are central to a service-dominant perspective on public management processes, are also identified as contributive elements. Because SP is and has been a focal point of public sector reforms worldwide, we believe that identifying other micro-activities that contribute to positive outcomes is of critical importance. Hence, we encourage others to contribute to this research field to generate a deep reservoir of knowledge on the micro-activities and outcomes of SP in public organizations.

5.8. References

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CHAPTER 6: STRATEGIC-DECISION QUALITY IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: THE IMPORTANCE OF FORMAL AND PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIC PLANNING

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ABSTRACT - Strategic planning (SP) has conquered the public sector by storm based on the assumption that SP's approach to strategic decision-making strengthens strategic-decision quality (SDQ) in public organizations. Despite this assumption, it remains unclear if and how SP relates to SDQ. Drawing on survey data from 271 informants within 89 Flemish municipalities, we find that a SP process characterized by a systematic approach and the participation of top policymakers and managers as well as lower-level staff and external stakeholders contributes to SDQ.

6.1. Introduction

As a result of New Public Management (NPM), governments worldwide have mandated public organizations at all levels of government to adopt strategic planning (SP) (Poister 2010). Frequently discussed examples include the US Government Performance and Results Act and the UK Best Value Regime (Poister and Streib 2005, Boyne et al. 2002). The motive for this legislative action roots in the fact that, according to NPM, SP is assumed to contribute to public-sector strategic decision-making (Boyne 2001, Walker and Boyne 2006). More specifically, NPM expects that public organizations that adopt a systematic and analytic strategic decision-making process, characterized by stakeholder participation, will develop a more qualitative set of informed strategic decisions (i.e. a coherent and focused strategic plan) (Poister et al. 2013, Poister and Streib 2005).

Despite the assumed contribution of SP to public-sector strategic decision-making, the effectiveness of SP in public organizations is debated (Pollitt 2009). Bryson et al. (2009) argue that this debate is fueled by the fact that empirical studies focused on SP as a rational process that directly results in organizational performance (e.g. Andrews et al. 2009), thus illustrating a limited attention to 'who was involved', 'how the process was managed' and 'what consequences ensued' (Bryson et al. 2009, 173). Hence, to date it remains unclear whether SP contributes to public-sector strategic decision-making and, if so, which elements of SP account for said contribution. As such, the assumption that the adoption of SP will contribute to public-sector strategic decision-making seems to be 'a shot in the dark' (Walker and Boyne 2006, 375).

The study at hand addresses this issue by focusing on two constitutive elements of public-sector SP: the formality of SP (Poister et al. 2013) and the level of participation during SP (Poister and Streib 2005). Both elements are assumed to generate an information-rich decision-making environment for public organizations (Elbanna et al. 2015). First, through a formal SP process, information about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the organization is systematically gathered and analyzed in order to define strategic priorities (Poister et al. 2013). Second, through a participatory SP process, expectations of various stakeholders are incorporated into the strategic decision-making process which enhances the chance that the formulated strategic priorities acknowledge these expectations (Osborne et al. 2013). We

examine these elements in relation to strategic-decision quality of public organizations' strategic plan (SDQ), which measures the extent to which the strategic plan consist of a set of qualitative and informed strategic decisions as opposed to solely being an 'on the shelf' compliance document (Olson et al. 2007). Data were gathered in a sample of 89 Flemish municipalities because the Flemish government, in line with other governments worldwide, coerced Flemish municipalities to adopt SP (Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur 2013).

Hence, the contributions of this article to public management are twofold. First, we contribute to the literature on public-sector SP by testing the relation between SP formality, participation during SP and SDQ of public organizations' strategic plan. SDQ is a particularly relevant outcome because it is a key antecedent of successful plan implementation (Yang et al. 2009). Second, we focus on an institutional setting, namely a coerced SP process in Flemish municipalities, which is similar to institutional settings worldwide and thus present evidence-based findings relevant to a variety of public organizations (Boyne et al. 2002, Farneti 2009).

6.2. Strategic planning formality and strategic-decision quality

Our first hypothesis addresses the relation between SP formality and SDQ. SP formality is defined as the extent to which the SP process is a systematic and analytic strategic decision-making process that includes methodically developing a formal strategic plan, analyzing internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats, and defining strategic goals based on these analyses (Poister et al. 2013). Rational planning theory argues that the systematic and analytic nature of formal SP generates an information-rich decision-making environment, which in turn contributes to SDQ (Boyne 2001, Walker and Boyne 2006). More specifically, formal SP is expected to stimulate 'decisions between alternative strategies to be taken logically on the basis of comprehensive information, rather than intuitively on the basis of incomplete or inaccurate data' (Boyne 2001, 76).

Several public management scholars have argued the existence of a relation between SP formality and strategic decision-making in public organizations. For instance, Poister (2005, 1053) argues that formal SP processes 'provide overall direction for major decisions throughout the organization on an ongoing basis'.

Additionally, Baker (1992) illustrates that through formal SP a rationality is injected into the strategic decision-making process of a U.S. federal agency. Berry and Wechsler (1995) also indicate that 82% of their surveyed sample (i.e. US state agency directors) believe that formal SP offers assistance to strategic decision-making. Ingman et al. (2002) stipulate that SP is an essential instrument for the identification of strategic priorities during strategic decision-making. In addition, Elbanna et al. (2015) argue that formal strategic planning contributes to strategic decision-making in public organizations by increasing the likelihood that strategic decisions will actually be successfully implemented. Moreover, in the case of US municipalities, formal SP seems to be perceived as an effective strategic decision-making instrument and elements of a formal SP process have been found to contribute to municipal management and strategic decision-making (Poister and Streib 1989, 1994, 2005). Hence, based on the theoretical arguments of rational planning theory and the arguments of the above-mentioned public management scholars, we hypothesize that:

H1: SP formality is positively related to SDQ of public organizations' strategic plan.

6.3. Stakeholder participation and strategic-decision quality

Our second hypothesis addresses the relation between stakeholder participation during SP and SDQ. Integrative stakeholder participation theory argues that the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders during SP offers crucial insights into the expectations of key individuals and groups both in the internal as well as external context of the organization, thus contributing to an information-rich decision-making environment, which in turn contributes to SDQ (Blair 2004, Hendrick 2003). Typically, stakeholders of public organizations relevant for SP processes include top management, top policy makers, middle management, lower-level staff and service users (Poister and Streib 2005).

Stakeholder participation during SP has long been a focal point of case studies in public management research. Positive effects of stakeholder participation during SP were for instance identified by the case studies of Kemp et al. (1993), Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011) and Wheeland (1993). These studies typically find that stakeholder participation is a contributive element of SP in public organizations. Moreover, a relation between participation and SDQ was presumed by Alonso (2014) who indicated that public-sector

SP results in a set of strategic decisions that strongly affect the public interest and in order to maximize the quality of said decisions, the expectations of key stakeholders should be incorporated into the final strategic plan (Alonso 2014). Although several case studies discuss participation's contribution to SP in public organizations, large-n empirical evidence supporting this claim is scarce (Poister et al. 2010). One highly-cited study that does present such evidence was executed by Poister and Streib (2005) in US municipalities. More specifically, Poister and Streib (2005) found that external participation (i.e. citizens and other external stakeholders) and the participation of department heads and lower-level employees are positively associated with an outcome variable that includes enhanced strategic decision-making. Hence, drawing on the arguments of integrative stakeholder participation theory as well as the research evidence concerning the benefits of stakeholder participation in public-sector SP, we hypothesize that:

H2: Stakeholder participation during SP is positively related to SDQ of public organizations' strategic plan.

6.4. Methods

EMPIRICAL SETTING

Survey data was gathered in Flemish municipalities. As a result of legislation, Flemish municipalities were required to formulate a strategic plan by January 2014. Said plan is expected to contain the strategic blueprint of the municipality's 2014-2019 policy cycle including strategic policy goals, action plans, financial impact assessments and performance indicators (Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur 2013). This study thus focuses on (a) the formality of and participation during the SP process that was used by Flemish municipalities to formulate this strategic plan and (b) the perceived SDQ of this strategic plan (i.e. the degree to which the plan is perceived as a set of informed strategic decisions). The empirical setting of Flemish municipalities offers two methodological advantages. First, because of the compulsory nature of the above-mentioned legislation, the SP processes in Flemish municipalities were performed in a similar coercive setting and within the same time-frame, which allows us to better compare empirical findings (De Bruijn and Van Helden 2006). Second, Flemish municipalities are characterized by a homogeneous

institutional context, thus enabling us to control for certain institutional aspects and economic conditions without having to include several control variables (Goeminne and Smolders 2014).

DATA COLLECTION

A three-step data-gathering procedure was employed. First, all 308 Flemish municipalities were contacted and asked to provide the contact information of their chief planner (i.e. the individual responsible for formulating the municipal plan). In most cases, the chief planner was either the city manager or the financial manager. Second, each chief planner was asked to identify other planning team members within their municipality (i.e. other individuals who were centrally involved in the development of the municipal plan). Other planning team members include department heads, policy advisors, aldermen and, in some cases, the city mayor. Third, an electronic survey was sent to the chief planner and the identified planning team members. Items concerning SP formality and stakeholder participation were incorporated into the survey for the chief planner because the chief planner is best informed on the process characteristics of the SP process (Poister et al. 2013, Poister and Streib 2005). Items concerning SDQ were sent to both the chief planner and other planning team members because perceptions towards strategic decisions (i.e. the output of the SP process) should be asked to multiple informants to avoid single-informant bias (Olson et al. 2007). As such, our study utilizes single-informant data to measure the independent variables and multi-informant data to measure the dependent variable, thus limiting potential issues of common source bias. In total, we gathered survey data from 89 chief planners and 182 planning team members, which implies that our units of analysis consist of 89 Flemish municipalities (i.e. response rate of 28,90 per cent).

MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES

The dependent variable (i.e. SDQ) was measured with the six items presented by Olson et al. (2007) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .859$), which measure the overall quality of the strategic plan, the effect and results of the strategic plan so far, the range of issues addressed by the strategic plan, whether the strategic plan was well structured, clearly elaborated and expressed in depth (Olson et al. 2007). The first independent variable (i.e. SP formality) was measured with the four items presented by Poister et al. (2013) (see Table 19). We included a fifth item, namely the extent to which the municipality conducted an analysis of its

external opportunities and threats during plan development, because this typical element of formal SP was absent in the original four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .708$). The second independent variable (i.e. stakeholder participation during SP) was measured partially through the six items formulated by Poister and Streib (2005) but also through items recommended by an academic and practitioner committee (Cronbach's $\alpha = .705$) (see Table 19). This resulted in a list of eight stakeholder groups relevant to the Flemish municipal context: city mayor and aldermen, city council, city manager, financial manager, department heads and other senior management, lower-level employees, citizens, and other external stakeholders.

EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

As the selected operationalizations of the independent variables have, to date, only been included in a limited number of empirical studies, we decided to perform an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Table 19 lists the results of the analysis.

Table 19: Exploratory factor analysis of independent variables

Independent variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
<i>Strategic planning formality</i>				
Item 1: We developed our municipal plan through a systematic planning process.	,459	,008	,136	,631
Item 2: Our municipal plan was a formal strategic plan or an update of a formal strategic plan.	-,065	-,040	,067	,878
Item 3: During plan development, we conducted situational analyses of our municipality's strengths and weaknesses.	,889	,214	,160	-,061
Item 4: During plan development, we conducted situational analyses of our environment's opportunities and threats.	,853	,276	,191	-,017
Item 5: During plan development, we established strategic goals and used them to drive decisions and actions throughout our municipality.	,718	,172	,093	,226
<i>Stakeholder participation</i>				
Item 6: The mayor and aldermen have been centrally involved in the development of our municipal plan.	,247	,271	,542	-,007
Item 7: The city council has been centrally involved in the development of our municipal plan.	,120	,323	,450	-,099
Item 8: The city manager has been centrally involved in the development of our municipal plan.	,169	-,123	,714	,034
Item 9: The financial manager has been centrally involved in the development of our municipal plan.	-,189	,058	,824	,169
Item 10: Department heads and other senior managers have been centrally involved in the development of our municipal plan.	,271	,119	,593	,134
Item 11: Lower-level employees have been centrally involved in the development of our municipal plan.	,107	,634	,209	-,016
Item 12: Citizens have been centrally involved in the development of our municipal plan.	,169	,865	,014	,116
Item 13: Other external stakeholders have been centrally involved in the development of our municipal plan.	,278	,821	,027	-,125
Cumulative variance (%)	19,832	36,657	53,389	63,474

Note: n = 89 Flemish municipalities

The conducted EFA suggests that a structure of four latent constructs, and not two as expected, is underlying the measured independent items. The four factors explain 63,47 per cent of the variance. The identified structure seems robust as only two items (item 1 and item 7) crossload (loading of .32 or more) on two or more factors (Tabachnick and Fidell 2013). However, as the variables do not load strong ($\geq .50$) on each factor, these crossloadings are not considered troublesome (Costello and Osborne 2005). In addition, all items display moderately to strong communality with the exception of item 7, which failed to reach the desirable factor loading of at least .50 (Costello and Osborne 2005). Hence, item 7 was omitted.

The EFA indicates that 'SP formality' consists of two factors. One factor, which we label as the 'analytic dimension' of municipal SP, groups the items that measure the degree to which the municipal SP process consists of analyzing strengths and weaknesses, analyzing opportunities and threats, and defining strategic goals based on said analysis. A second factor, which we label as the 'systematic dimension' of municipal SP, groups the items that measure the degree to which the SP process was a systematic process that resulted in a formal strategic plan. The identified two factors correspond with rational planning theory, which argues that SP processes are typically both systematic (i.e. following a stepwise approach that results in a formal strategic plan) and analytic (i.e. conducting analysis in order to gather information and then converging said information into strategic goals) (Poister et al. 2013, Boyne 2001, Andrews et al. 2009).

The EFA also suggests that 'stakeholder participation' consists of two factors. We labelled these factors as 'top policymakers and managers' (TP & M) and 'lower-level staff and external stakeholders' (LS & ES). Stakeholder theory typically argues that different groups of stakeholders exist based on interest and power, and managers should be aware of this distinction in order to keep stakeholder participation 'manageable' (Hendrick 2003). Hence, the factor TP & M represent the top layer of policy and management within the municipality. This includes the mayor and aldermen, the city manager, the financial manager, and department heads and other senior managers. Because these stakeholders are typically also responsible for formulating and implementing strategic plans, these individuals should be actively involved as planning team members in the SP process (Elbanna et al. 2015). The factor LS & ES aggregates stakeholders who do not necessarily play an active role but who are consulted during the SP process. While the inclusion of these stakeholders as core planning team members of the SP process might be unmanageable (Hendrick 2003),

they still represent an important source of information (Alonso 2014). More specifically, lower-level employees are frequently in contact with the actual service users of the municipality and are thus aware of the needs of said users. Additionally, citizens and other external stakeholders are directly impacted by the municipal plan and could provide information that aligns the plan to their specific needs (Osborne et al. 2013).

6.5. Data analysis and results

The analyses were conducted using R version 3.1.3 with the package for Partial Least Squares (PLS) Path Modelling. PLS, which is a structural equation modelling (SEM) technique, was selected as it offers several advantages. First, PLS is a component-based approach and as such places minimal requirements on sample size and residual distributions to achieve sufficient statistical power. The method is thus advantageous when used with small sample sizes (Hair et al. 2013, Hair et al. 2012). Chin (1998), for example, suggested that the number of paths leading to the endogenous construct with the most paths, multiplied by 10, provides an indication of the minimal sample size required. In the proposed model four paths (from the four factors identified in the EFA) lead to our dependent variable (i.e. SDQ), meaning that a minimum sample size of 40 would be sufficient. Consequently, the study's sample size ($n = 89$) meets this requirement. Second, PLS is a statistical method that allows the use of latent variables and thus simultaneously assess measurement and structural models (Hair et al. 2013, Hair et al. 2012, Chin 1998). Therefore, PLS enables us to not only assess the paths between our latent constructs but also to further test the validity of the factor structure identified in the EFA.

As indicated, PLS requires the construction of a latent variable model to test the hypothesized relationships between the constructs of interest. The actual analysis follows a two-step approach (Sanchez 2013). In the first step, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to assess the fit of the measurement model to the data. In the second step, the relationships between the constructs are estimated and a structural model is constructed.

MEASUREMENT MODEL, DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS

The psychometric properties of the reflective measurement model were assessed by conducting PLS analysis. As expected, based on the previously conducted EFA, the confirmatory factor analysis generated five distinct factors: four factors relating to SP formality and participation and one factor aggregating the items related to SDQ. Table 20 lists the PLS item loadings and cross-loadings. Item loadings and reliabilities were considered acceptable as the majority of the items scored above .70 (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Table 20: PLS factor loadings

Item	SD	AD	TP & M	LS & ES	SDQ
Item 1	.99	.40	.33	.14	.46
Item 2	.42	.04	.10	-.10	.07
Item 3	.30	.94	.35	.40	.24
Item 4	.31	.95	.39	.46	.32
Item 5	.42	.75	.26	.30	.23
Item 6	.26	.33	.79	.37	.37
Item 8	.22	.24	.66	.10	.16
Item 9	.15	.05	.66	.06	.17
Item 10	.26	.37	.68	.22	.27
Item 11	.12	.30	.25	.54	.13
Item 12	.13	.36	.28	.92	.33
Item 13	.07	.43	.29	.92	.38
Item 14: Our municipal plan has had a positive effect on our municipality.	.24	.20	.36	.46	.81
Item 15: Relative to what I expected, the results of our municipal plan have been positive.	.31	-.04	.21	.02	.61
Item 16: Overall, I feel that the quality of our municipal plan was good.	.55	.26	.34	.27	.85
Item 17: Our municipal plan covered the maximum range of relevant issues.	.26	.29	.29	.34	.87
Item 18: Our municipal plan was well structured and reflective of interrelations and intrarelations among the relevant issues.	.42	.35	.36	.33	.91
Item 19: Our municipal plan was expressed in depth.	.35	.24	.24	.25	.77

Note: Figures in boldface represent the loadings of individual items on their corresponding factors. SD = systematic dimension of formal strategic planning, AD = analytic dimension of formal strategic planning, CS = core stakeholder participation, PS = peripheral stakeholder participation, SDQ = strategic-decision quality

Although some authors advise to drop items with factor loadings lower than .70, we decided to not omit these items. None of the items in question display an item loading lower than .40, which is deemed acceptable by Hair et al. (2013) for exploratory studies and there was no indication of cross-loadings (i.e. all items loaded higher on the expected construct than on the other constructs). The reliability of the

measurement model was further tested by calculating the composite reliability scores (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE). Table 21 indicates that the constructs have acceptable internal consistency as all CR scores exceed the required threshold of .70 (Hair et al. 2013). In addition, the fact that all constructs have an AVE of $\geq .50$ indicates convergent validity and provides further proof that the composite measurement items have adequate item reliability (Elbanna et al. 2013).

Table 21: Descriptive statistics

	Theoretical range	Actual range	Mean	St. dev.	CR	AVE
Systematic dimension ^a	6	4	4,938	1,002	-	-
Analytic dimension	6	5	5,611	1,080	.91	.78
Top policymakers and managers	6	3,25	6,388	,672	.79	.52
Lower-level staff and external stakeholders	6	5,33	4,247	1,200	.85	.66
Strategic-decision quality	6	3,16	4,867	,594	.92	.65

Note: n = 89 Flemish municipalities

^a Because the construct 'systematic dimension' is measured with only two items, it is not advisable to calculate the CR or AVE.

As discussed earlier, the fact that all items included in the study load more strongly on their corresponding construct than other constructs is a first criterion indicating discriminant validity (see Table 20). A second criterion for discriminant validity requires that the square root of the AVE scores of each variable should be higher than the bivariate correlations involving the construct (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Table 22 shows that all constructs meet this requirement.

Table 22: Inter-construct correlations and average variance extracted (AVE)

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Systematic dimension	^a				
2. Analytic dimension	.38***	.78			
3. Top policymakers and managers	.33**	.39***	.49		
4. Lower-level staff and external stakeholders	.12	.45***	.32**	.66	
5. Strategic-decision quality	.45***	.30**	.38***	.37***	.65

Note: n = 89 Flemish municipalities

Off-diagonal elements are correlations, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

Bold face diagonal values are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE). Values should be larger than off-diagonal elements in order to satisfy discriminant validity requirements.

^aThe latent variable 'systematic dimension' consists of two variables, which does not allow to reliably calculate the AVE.

STRUCTURAL MODEL

The second step of the data analysis process examined the significance and strength of each of the hypothesized effects by running, in R, a PLS structural model using bootstrapping (5000 bootstrap samples).

The results indicate that the included exogenous variables explain 32.8% (R²) of the variance of SDQ. Table 23 provides detailed information about the analyzed paths.

Table 23: PLS path modelling results

Path from:	Path coefficient	t-value	p-value	95% Bootstrapped Confidence Intervals	
				Low	High
Systematic dimension	.37	3.67	.00**	.04	.54
Analytic dimension	-.03	-.29	.77	-.23	.19
Top policymakers and managers	.18	1.77	.08 ⁺	.04	.36
Lower-level staff and external stakeholders	.29	2.82	.01*	.14	.43

Note: n = 89 Flemish municipalities

Reported p-values are one tailed: ⁺Significant at .10, *Significant at .05, **Significant at .001.

With respect to the effect of SP formality on SDQ, the study results indicate that the systematic dimension of formal SP has a positive relationship with SDQ (path = .37, t = 3.67, p < .001) while the analytic dimension of formal SP is not significantly related with SDQ (path = -.03, t = -.29, p > .10). As such, the analysis results only partially support H1. Our results also indicate that stakeholder participation is positively related with

SDQ. More specifically, the results show that involvement of TP & M (path = .18, $t = 1.77$, $p < .10$) and LS & ES (path = .29, $t = 2.82$, $p < .01$) is positively related with SDQ. H2 is thus fully supported. Although the non-bootstrapped path coefficient for the path between TP & M and SDQ is only significant at the $p < .10$, the fact that the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval for the path coefficient does not include zero, provides support for the significance of this path.

6.6. Discussion

This article investigates the relation between public-sector SP and SDQ in a sample of Flemish municipalities. This relation is one of the key assumptions underlying NPM and has resulted in the widespread, and often coerced, adoption of SP by public organizations. We focused on the formality of the SP process and level of participation during the SP process because these two elements of SP are, based on rational planning theory and integrative stakeholder participation theory, argued to contribute to SDQ. Based on an exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, we found that, in the case of Flemish municipalities, two additional dimensions underlie SP formality (i.e. a systematic and analytic dimension) as well as stakeholder participation (i.e. participation of the top policy and management team, and participation of lower-level staff and external stakeholders). By constructing a PLS structural model, our findings suggest that NPM's assumption seems to hold truth, but is contingent on the systematic dimension of SP and the extent to which top policy makers and managers as well as lower-level staff and external stakeholders are involved in SP. Based on these findings, several implications for public management can be discerned.

Whereas rational planning theory argues that SP formality is positively related to SDQ (Boyne 2001, Walker and Boyne 2006), our findings only partially support this statement. More specifically, we uncover evidence that developing a formal strategic plan through a systematic process (i.e. the systematic dimension of SP) contributes to SDQ. However, we did not uncover evidence that the definition of strategic goals based on a SWOT-analysis (i.e. the analytic dimension of SP) has any significant effect on SDQ. Nevertheless, the emphasis of Flemish legislation has been on the formulation of strategic goals based on a SWOT-analysis (Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur 2013). A possible rationale for this finding could be that the definition of

strategic goals based on a SWOT-analysis might have been a matter of compliance, addressing the requirements and norms of central authorities (Taylor 2011), as opposed to a truly analytic and strategic exercise. Typically, the analytic dimension of SP requires effort and expertise, time and resources, as well as education and training, and, as was the case with other coerced SP processes such as Best Value, these prerequisites might not have been present in Flemish municipalities (Boyne and Gould-Williams 2003). However, our findings do imply that following a systematic process and developing a formal strategic plan contributes to SDQ. This finding seems to tie in with the recommendation of Ugboro et al. (2011), Kemp et al. (1993) and Baker (1992) to define upfront SP guidelines and clarify expectations. More specifically, chief planners and other planning team members can, in advance, clarify the systematic process that will be followed during SP in order to ensure that the methodical, stepwise approach of SP is safeguarded throughout the planning process. Additionally, chief planners and other planning team members should, in advance, agree upon the nature of the output resulting from the systematic SP process, namely to produce a formal strategic plan that has an organizationwide impact and not just a compliance document that lacks any strategic dimension (Ugboro et al. 2011, Kemp et al. 1993, Baker 1992).

Moreover, our findings support integrative stakeholder participation theory because the participation of both top policymakers and managers (TP & M), as well as lower-level staff and external stakeholders (LS & ES) during SP is positively related to SDQ (Hendrick 2003). TP & M represent the top politicians and managers within the municipality (e.g. mayor, city manager). Our research findings reveal the importance of including this top layer of the municipality during SP, which is in line with the literature on vertical strategic alignment (Andrews et al. 2012). More specifically, SP is a time- and resource-consuming practice for top layer politicians and managers in public organizations. By actively involving these individuals during SP, public organizations ensure that the SP process as well as the strategic plan 'fit the management style of the organization' (Ugboro et al. 2011, 110). As such, SP is injected with insights into the requirements of both top politicians and managers within the organization, which, in turn, contributes to SDQ. Apart from the top politicians and managers, who are arguably the 'usual suspects' involved in public-sector SP, our findings suggest that a participatory SP process should also involve LS & ES. This finding conforms to the service-dominant approach to public management (Osborne et al. 2013). More specifically, public

organizations deliver a range of services to citizens and other external stakeholders. The first point of contact between the organization and these service users often takes place through lower-level staff. Hence, in order to ensure that the needs of service users are injected into the strategic plan, both lower-level staff, citizens and other external stakeholders need to be consulted. Thus, by including these three groups of stakeholders, SP 'generates basic information about current and future needs that can then support policy formulation' (Osborne et al. 2013, 142).

6.7. Limitations

Although our study contributes to the debate on the effectiveness of public-sector SP, following limitations need to be acknowledged. First, our study is based on a cross sectional survey, longitudinal data could complement our findings and offer more robust empirical evidence. Second, although we collect survey data from both chief planners and other planning team members, this is still perceptual data. By incorporating archival data, future research could anticipate some of the issues associated with common method bias.

6.8. Conclusion

The study at hand focuses on strategic planning's effectiveness in public organizations by investigating the relation between a formal and participatory strategic planning process and strategic-decision quality in a sample of 89 Flemish municipalities. Factor analysis indicates that a formal strategic planning process consists of a systematic and analytic dimension while a participatory strategic planning process consists of participation by top policymakers and managers as well as participation by lower-level staff and external stakeholders. By constructing a PLS structural model, we found that (a) the systematic dimension of formal strategic planning contributes to strategic-decision quality but the analytic dimension does not, a finding which opposes the arguments of rational planning theory, and (b) the participation of both top policymakers and managers as well as lower-level employees and external stakeholders contributes to strategic-decision quality, a finding which supports the arguments of integrative stakeholder participation theory. Our findings thus suggest that strategic planning can indeed contribute to strategic-decision quality

in public organizations as argued by New Public Management. However, this contribution is contingent on both the systematic as well as participatory nature of the strategic planning process.

6.9. References

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CHAPTER 7: COGNITIVE STYLES, USER ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT TO STRATEGIC PLANS IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT - Given the lack of insights into the micro-determinants of strategic planning in public organizations, this study uses information-processing theory and self-efficacy theory to investigate individual-level predictors of commitment to strategic plans among planning team members (PTMs). Specifically, we investigate whether plan commitment is contingent upon the fit between PTMs' preferred way of information-processing (i.e. their cognitive style) and the systematic, analytic and rational information-processing system underlying strategic planning. Based on data gathered with 439 PTMs from 203 Flemish municipalities, we find that PTMs with a creating and planning style are committed to strategic plans because they deem strategic planning useful.

7.1. Introduction

Strategic planning (SP) in public organizations is ‘a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is (its identity), what it does (its strategies and actions), and why it does it (mandates, mission, goals, and the creation of public value)’ (Bryson 2010, S256). The deliberative and disciplined nature of SP implies that it can be viewed, according to information-processing theory (IPT) (Simon 1973), as an organizational system that employs a systematic, analytic and rational approach to information-processing. During SP the planning team uses a stepwise process (i.e. systematic) to converge information about the organization into a set of strategic options (i.e. analytic), resulting in the selection of strategic goals (i.e. rational) (Bryson 2011, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013).

Although the systematic, analytic and rational approach of SP is advocated for public organizations (Bryson 2010), the effectiveness of public SP remains subject to debate (Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2015). While there is meta-analytic evidence on a positive relation between SP and performance in, mostly US and UK, local governments (Walker and Andrews 2015), there remains criticism on the mechanistic nature of SP and its inapplicability in the public sector (e.g. Bovaird 2008, Radin 2006). Moreover, empirical evidence on SP’s effectiveness in public-sector contexts other than the US or the UK is generally lacking (George and Desmidt 2014). As a result, the comment of Walker and Boyne (2006, 375) that the effectiveness of public SP is largely ‘a shot in the dark’ still seems to be valid.

Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson (2009) argue that a micro-level perspective could be useful to address the debate on public SP’s effectiveness because empirical studies typically focused on the macro-level relation between SP and organizational performance (e.g. Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Walker and Boyne 2006). Although these studies provided crucial insights, they exhibited limited attention to the micro level of SP by (a) neglecting the individuals involved in planning (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009, George and Desmidt 2014, George et al. 2016) and (b) operationalizing SP’s effectiveness through outcomes (e.g. performance) as opposed to output (e.g. commitment to strategic plans) (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, George et al. 2016, George and Desmidt 2016).

Building on the call of Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson (2009), this study adopts a micro-level perspective on SP's effectiveness by examining the relation between cognitive styles of planning team members (PTMs), PTMs' acceptance of the SP process and PTMs' commitment to strategic plans. By looking at commitment to strategic plans as dependent variable, we offer insights into a crucial individual-level process output of SP in public organizations. Earlier research has suggested that PTMs' commitment to the strategic plan is an important driver of successful strategy implementation (Parayitam and Dooley 2009) because it 'decreases the likelihood of major resistance from those who dislike change' and 'creates a vision or a valued cause that motivates [PTMs] to ensure a successful implementation' (Olson, Parayitam, and Bao 2007, 203). In other words, commitment to the strategic plan implies that PTMs consider the plan as a set of strategic ideas worth implementing and thus become the guiding coalition necessary to implement these ideas (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009).

Based on IPT (Simon 1973) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1982), we argue that PTMs' cognitive styles and acceptance of the SP process are individual-level predictors of plan commitment. Specifically, we argue that commitment to strategic plans is contingent on the fit between PTMs' preferred way of information-processing (i.e. their cognitive style) and the systematic, analytic and rational information-processing approach advocated by SP (Bryson 2011, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013). This is an important research avenue because individual-organizational information-processing fit has been found to play a key role in individuals' acceptance of organizational information-processing systems (Armstrong, Cools, and Sadler-Smith 2012), which, in turn, is linked to the behavioral intention to fully adopt this system and its output (Lu, Yu, and Lu 2001). Applied to SP in public organizations, we expect PTMs' cognitive style to be related to their acceptance of the SP process while acceptance of the SP process is expected to be related to commitment to implement the strategic plan.

The study's assumptions were tested using a sample of 439 PTMs from 203 Flemish municipalities. In line with public sector reforms in a variety of OECD-countries, Flemish municipalities have been required, by law, to change their planning procedures by adopting a systematic, analytic and rational information-processing model of SP (George, Desmidt, and De Moyer 2016, Boyne 2001). Although our research focus lies at the individual level, the study's respondents are clustered within municipalities. Consequently, our

individual-level data is analyzed using structural equation modelling with clustered standard errors to account for organizational-level variables that might bias the findings.

The contributions of our study are fourfold. First, we contribute to the debate on SP's effectiveness in public organizations by investigating determinants of commitment to strategic plans, a crucial ingredient for successful plan implementation (Olson, Parayitam, and Bao 2007). Second, we address the call of Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson (2009) for the adoption of a micro-level perspective in SP research by focusing on the individuals responsible for plan formulation and implementation (i.e. PTMs). Third, by choosing Flemish municipalities as empirical setting we complement the literature by offering evidence on SP in a non-US and non-UK local government setting which simultaneously offers similarities with other public sector settings and reforms worldwide (e.g. Best Value in the United Kingdom, Government Performance and Results Act in the United States) (George and Desmidt 2014). Fourth, because of our focus on individuals as well as our adoption of concepts from cognitive psychology, we contribute to the literature stream underlying the recent emergence of a Behavioral Public Administration (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2016).

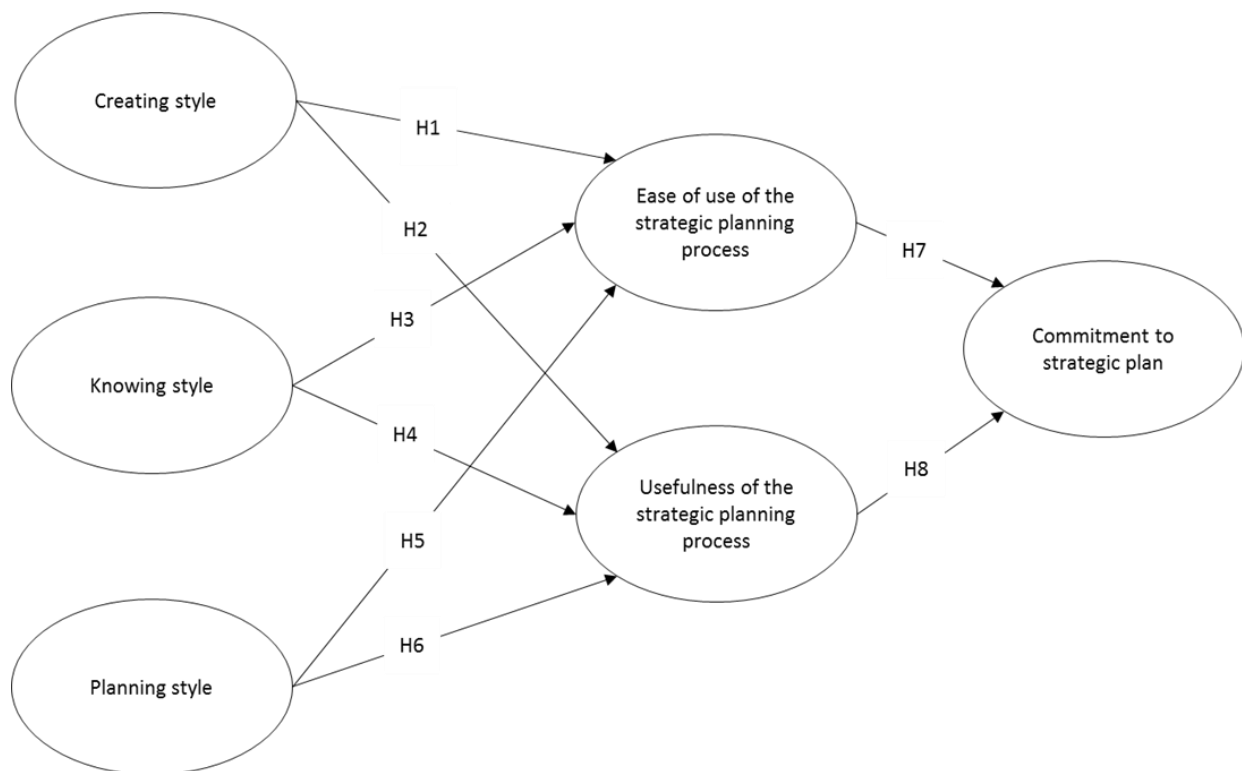
In what follows, we elaborate on our theoretical framework and the hypothesized model. Next, we present the methods employed, details of the data analysis and its results. Our findings suggest that the cognitive style of PTMs indeed matters to their acceptance of SP, which, in turn, is associated with their commitment to strategic plans. How these relations materialize, however, partially deviates from our hypotheses derived from IPT and self-efficacy theory. We discuss the implications of these findings for public management research and practice.

7.2. Theory and hypotheses

Figure 7 displays the underlying hypothesized model of this study. The model states that PTMs' cognitive style is associated with their perceived ease of use and usefulness of the SP process (i.e. user acceptance), which, in turn, is associated with their commitment to implement the strategic plan. We employ IPT (Simon 1973) to hypothesize the relation between cognitive styles and user acceptance whereas the hypothesized relation between user acceptance and plan commitment draws on self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1982). Importantly, although our study is, we believe, the first to adopt this specific conceptual chain when

studying SP, the logic underlying the chain (i.e. cognitive styles relate to user acceptance, user acceptance relates to the intention to exhibit specific behaviour) is grounded in a variety of behavioural studies (e.g. Lu, Yu, and Lu 2001, Chakraborty, Hu, and Cui 2008, Saeed, Yun, and Sinnappan 2009). The remainder of this literature review highlights the key concepts presented in Figure 7 and elaborates on the hypothesized relationships.

Figure 7: Hypothesized model



COGNITIVE STYLES AND USER ACCEPTANCE

Based on IPT (Simon 1973), we argued in the previous section that SP can be viewed as an information-processing system intended to help PTMs converge information into a set of strategic goals through a systematic, analytic and rational process. Ideally, one would expect that such a SP process results in a plan that is successfully implemented within the organization. Successful plan implementation, however, depends, in part, on the behavioural intent of individuals – typically grouped in a ‘guiding coalition’ – who show a commitment to implement the plan throughout the organization (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). Such commitment to plan implementation is thus a behavioural matter, which implies that behavioural

insights can be useful to understand its determinants (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2016). Self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1986, 1982), for example, suggests that individuals will only be motivated to engage in specific behaviour if they think that this specific behaviour will produce positively valued outcomes (i.e. outcome expectations) and if they are confident in their ability to perform the behaviour successfully (i.e. efficacy expectations). In his research on the use of information (technology) systems Davis (1989, 320) labelled these two aspects as 'user acceptance' and argued that if individuals find an information system useful (i.e. 'using a particular system [will] enhance [...] performance') and easy to use (i.e. 'using a particular system [will] be free of effort'), they are like to exhibit the behavioural intent to use the system. Extrapolating these behavioural insights to SP, which we defined as an information-processing system based on IPT, implies that in order to understand PTMs' commitment to implement plans (i.e. behavioural intent), we need to analyse the determinants of user acceptance (i.e. perceived usefulness and ease of use) of the underlying SP process.

In order to identify individual-level predictors of PTMs acceptance of the SP process, we draw on IPT. Central to IPT is the argument that both organizational management processes as well as individuals are information-processing systems with specific attributes (Rogers, Miller, and Judge 1999, Simon 1973). Consequently, the acceptance of organizational management processes is, in part, contingent upon the extent to which the information-processing characteristics of the process match those of the individual (Cools, Van den Broeck, and Bouckennooghe 2009, Kroll 2014, Nutt 2006). In cognitive psychology, an individual's preferred way of information-processing is labelled 'cognitive style' (Armstrong, Cools, and Sadler-Smith 2012) and has been linked to, for instance, preferences towards performance information use (Kroll 2014) and preferences towards budgetary decision-making (Nutt 2006). Extending these insights to SP, we expect that when the cognitive style of a PTM fits the systematic, analytic and rational information-processing style of SP, the PTM's acceptance of the SP process will be higher. On the contrary, when there is a cognitive misfit between a PTM's cognitive style and the information-processing nature of SP, the acceptance of the SP process will be lower (e.g. Armstrong, Cools, and Sadler-Smith 2012, Lu, Yu, and Lu 2001, Chakraborty, Hu, and Cui 2008).

Historically, cognitive styles have been predominantly conceptualized as a bipolar dimension that makes a distinction between an analytic and an intuitive way of thinking (Hodgkinson and Sadler-Smith 2003). Recently, multidimensional views took the forefront (Sadler-Smith 2009), arguing that cognitive styles cannot be captured by only two dimensions (Sadler-Smith, Spicer, and Tsang 2000). Following these evolutions, we used the three-dimensional Cognitive Style Indicator (CoSI) model of Cools and Van den Broeck (2007), which distinguishes between a creating, a knowing and a planning cognitive style. People scoring high on the creating style tend to make decisions primarily based on intuition or gut feeling (e.g. Cools and Van den Broeck 2008, Knockaert et al. 2015). People with a creating style search for renewal, see problems as opportunities, and feel comfortable in situations of uncertainty and freedom (Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). Preferences which seem to oppose the systematic and structured approach underlying SP as well as the environmental analysis and rational selection of strategic goals typically associated with SP (Bryson 2011, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). Subsequently, we expect a creating style to be negatively related to PTMs' acceptance of SP. This results in following hypotheses:

H1: A creating style is negatively related to PTM's perceived ease of use of the SP process.

H2: A creating style is negatively related to PTM's perceived usefulness of the SP process.

On the contrary, we expect a positive relation with SP acceptance for PTMs with a knowing and a planning style, given that these styles are characterised by diverse, but complementary ways of analytical thinking (Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). People scoring high on the knowing style have strong analytical skills, are proficient in logical reasoning, search for accuracy, and like to make informed decisions on the basis of a thorough analysis of facts and logical and rational arguments (Cools and Van den Broeck 2008). They seem likely to accept the analytic and rational nature of SP processes because of their preference for informed decision-making. People scoring high on the planning style are attracted by structure, they search for certainty, and prefer a well-organized environment. Planners like to make decisions in a structured way and are mostly concerned with the efficiency of the process (Cools and Van den Broeck 2008). Given planners' preference for structure, it seems likely that planners will accept the systematic, stepwise and methodical

approach to decision-making propagated by SP processes (Bryson 2011, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). In summary:

H3: A knowing style is positively related to PTM's perceived ease of use of the SP process.

H4: A knowing style is positively related to PTM's perceived usefulness of the SP process.

H5: A planning style is positively related to PTM's perceived ease of use of the SP process.

H6: A planning style is positively related to PTM's perceived usefulness of the SP process.

USER ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Due to our argument that successful plan implementation is, in its nature, a behavioral outcome preceded by a behavioral intent (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009), we can extrapolate the insights of self-efficacy theory to our hypotheses. As discussed, self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1986, 446) argues that 'in any given instance, behavior would be best predicted by considering both self-efficacy and outcome belief', with self-efficacy indicating how well an individual can execute specific behavior (i.e. ease of use) and outcome belief indicating the extent to which an individual believes the behavior will result in positive outcomes (i.e. usefulness) (Bandura 1982). In this study, the focus lies on the behavioral intent of PTMs to actually implement the formulated strategic plan in practice, and thus safeguard its strategic ideas throughout the organization (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). An intention which is described as PTMs' commitment to the strategic plan (Olson, Parayitam, and Bao 2007). Therefore, drawing on self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1986, 1982), we hypothesize that:

H7: Perceived ease of use of the SP process is positively related to commitment to the strategic plan.

H8: Perceived usefulness of the SP process is positively related to commitment to the strategic plan.

7.3. Methods

EMPIRICAL SETTING

This study focuses on PTMs within Flemish municipalities. In Flanders (i.e. the Northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), local authorities have been required by law to adopt an integrated policy and management system starting from January 2014. The coerced adoption of this system requires a change in the planning procedures of Flemish local authorities. Specifically, the cornerstone of the new system is the development of a multiannual municipal plan attuned with the three components of the information-processing model of SP: (a) adopt a systematic plan development process with clear deadlines, (b) analyze the municipality's internal and external environment and (c) formulate strategic goals based on these analyses. The developed plan can be updated yearly based on new information (George, Desmidt, and De Moyer 2016). The responsibility for developing the plan is assigned, by law, to the city manager who has the option of composing a planning team to support the plan development process. Restricting our analysis to Flemish municipalities offers the advantage that (a) SP is conducted within a similar timeframe and institutional setting thus allowing us to better compare empirical findings (De Bruijn and Van Helden 2006) and (b) other influences on plan commitment (e.g. legal constraints, economic shocks, policies of higher governments) are controlled for (Goeminne and Smolders 2014).

UNITS OF ANALYSIS

The actual units of analysis are the individual PTMs within Flemish municipalities. For the purpose of this study, we define PTMs as all individuals who are identified as key players in the plan formulation process, irrespective of whether they have a political, managerial or non-managerial role. Typically, literature on SP in public organizations identifies political leaders, managerial staff as well as non-managerial staff as responsible for SP (George and Desmidt 2014, Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010). We thus prefer this broad and factual definition of PTMs as opposed to a narrow and theoretical definition (e.g. only top management team members). The rationale underlying our units of analysis is twofold. First, because we wanted to make sure that our respondents would be capable of adequately replying to our questions (MacKenzie and

Podsakoff 2012), we needed expert informants involved in SP. Second, the literature stresses the importance of a 'guiding coalition' for effective strategy implementation (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). Hence, we propose that – at the very least – the planning team should be a starting point within this coalition. Importantly, although one might argue that PTMs are positively biased towards user acceptance of SP and plan commitment, our descriptives (see Table 24, means ranging from 4.2 to 4.8 on a 7-point Likert scale) do not seem to support a strong and systematic positive bias.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were derived from an electronic survey conducted in March – April 2015 among PTMs in Flemish municipalities. To ensure face validity (Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson 2012), the survey was extensively reviewed by experts, including SP-consultants who advise Flemish municipalities, managers in Flemish local authorities (excluding municipalities but subjected to the same change in planning procedures) and full professors with both academic and managerial experience in Flemish local authorities. The actual data collection process encompassed two phases and can be viewed as a multistage sampling procedure. First, the city managers of all 308 Flemish municipalities were contacted to identify the PTMs. The city managers of 241 Flemish municipalities agreed to participate in the study and provided the contact information of, in total, 998 PTMs. Second, all 998 PTMs were invited to participate in an electronic survey. In total, 439 PTMs responded (i.e. a response rate of 44%). These PTMs are distributed over 203 Flemish municipalities (i.e. 66% of all Flemish municipalities). Eighty municipalities have one respondent while 123 municipalities have more than one respondent (ranging from 2 to 12 PTMs, with an average of 2.9) (see the online appendix, Table A for more information on the frequency distribution).

We tested for non-response bias by comparing responses of late and early respondents through time trend extrapolation (Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson 2012). No significant differences were identified. The respondents to our survey were primarily male (52.4%), with a mean age of 44 years (SD = 9). On average, they had been with the municipality for 14 years (SD = 10). A small percentage of respondents (6.6%) had a political function, whereas the large majority (93.4%) held an administrative function. More than half of

the respondents (61.8%) were either a city manager, financial manager or department head, whereas 31.6% held a non-managerial administrative function.

Analysis of the data indicates that there are only 82 missing observed variable values (i.e. 0.7% of all observed data) (see the online appendix, Table B for a detailed overview). Specifically, the percentage missing values per observed variable range from 0.2% to 2.1% while only two variables have more than 1% of the observed data missing. To avoid reducing the number of respondents missing data were imputed at item level. Given the limited missing rate and the fact that data are Missing Completely At Random (MCAR test Chi-square = 876.65, df = 847, p = .233), missing data were imputed using the single imputation expectation-maximization method (EM) rather than a multiple imputation method. EM is 'unbiased and efficient when the missing mechanism is ignorable' (Dong and Peng 2013, 9).

MEASURES

All constructs were measured using seven-point Likert scales (ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)). Plan commitment was measured with the six-item scale developed by Olson, Parayitam, and Bao (2007). This scale focused on the extent to which PTMs were prepared to put time and effort in successful plan implementation, and the content of the plan was in line with their expectations regarding the best strategies for their municipality (Olson, Parayitam, and Bao 2007, Parayitam and Dooley 2009). Ease of use and usefulness of the SP process were measured with four items respectively, developed by Hung, Chang, and Yu (2006). The items for both ease of use and usefulness were adapted to the specific context by asking respondents to focus on the ease of use and usefulness of the plan development process underlying the mandated change in planning procedures within Flemish municipalities. Cognitive style was measured with the 18-item Cognitive Style Indicator (CoSI) of Cools and Van den Broeck (2007): seven items for the creating style, four items for the knowing style and seven items for the planning style. We chose CoSI because recent developments in the cognitive styles field argue that there are more dimensions than the historically used 2 cognitive styles (intuitive versus analytical) and the CoSI indicator is recommended as a state-of-the-art three-dimensional measure which addresses these developments (Armstrong, Cools, and Sadler-Smith 2012). Moreover, strong support has been found for CoSI's construct and predictive validity in different

Western and non-Western samples (Armstrong, Cools, and Sadler-Smith 2012, Cools, De Pauw, and Vanderheyden 2011, Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). An overview of the included items can be consulted in the online appendix, Table C.

Despite the fact that the intervals between the values of the seven-point Likert scales cannot be presumed equal and thus fall, strictly speaking, within the ordinal level of measurement, the employed Likert scales will be treated as if they are continuous to allow the use of parametric tests. Notwithstanding some controversy, treating seven-point Likert scales as continuous is deemed acceptable when sets of Likert-scales, with sufficient internal consistency, are used to analyze an underlying variable because this adds variability to the data (Allen and Seaman 2007). In addition, there are many studies of robustness indicating that applying parametric tests to Likert-scale data ‘doesn’t increase the chance [of an erroneous conclusion] very much (or even not at all)’ (Norman 2010, 627).

Finally, typical controls used by studies on cognitive style and user acceptance include age, education, gender and tenure (e.g. Knockaert et al. 2015, Cools, Van den Broeck, and Bouckennooghe 2009). However, the logic underlying the adoption of controls is (a) there is a theoretical explanation underlying the selection of these controls and (b) the controls are significantly correlated to the dependent and independent variables of interest (Bernerth and Aguinis 2016). Because these arguments do not apply to our study, we followed the recommendations of Bernerth and Aguinis (2016) and omitted these controls from our analysis. Moreover, due to our chosen data analytical technique, which accounts for clustering of individuals in municipalities, as well as our homogenous empirical setting, municipal-level controls were not included.

COMMON METHOD BIAS

This study relies on perceptual data collected through self-reported surveys which implies that common method bias (CMB) could be a concern (Favero and Bullock 2014). However, despite its limitations, using self-reported surveys as sole information source can be an appropriate measurement method when ‘both the predictor and criterion variables are capturing an individual’s perceptions, beliefs, judgments, or feelings’ (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff 2012, 549). Nevertheless, in order to mitigate the potential

impact of CMB, we used a set of ex ante remedies and executed ex post analyses (MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2012, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff 2012).

First, in line with recent advice on survey design in public management research (Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson 2012), we applied following ex ante remedies: (1) we only included measures that were previously published to enhance concurrent validity, (2) we avoided complex and abstract questions, (3) response options were clearly labeled, (4) a lag time was installed between the different constructs by placing them on different pages and incorporating buffer items, (5) the cover letter stressed that the respondents' personal opinion is of critical importance and that there were no right or wrong answers, (6) the cover letter stressed the voluntary nature of participation and guaranteed anonymity, and finally, (7) an academic and practitioner committee pretested the survey (MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2012, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff 2012).

Second, we conducted an ex post statistical analysis. The single-common-method-factor approach was used to control for CMB (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff 2012). Two measurement models were compared: one in which questionnaire items load on their constructs as well as on a latent common method factor and one that only contains the hypothesized model's constructs. The model with the method factor did not significantly improve the fit over the hypothesized factor model (TLI = .045), although the variables' factor loadings continued to be significant. Subsequently, the test results suggest that substantial CMB is absent.

7.4. Data analysis and results

UNIVARIATE AND BIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Table 24 presents the univariate and bivariate statistics for the study's measures. The variables' Cronbach's coefficient alphas (ranging from .76 to .92) provide the first evidence of construct reliability (see the section 'Multivariate analyses' for more detailed analyses).

Table 24: Descriptive statistics for the research constructs

	Mean	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Correlations ^a and construct reliabilities in parentheses					
						1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Study variables</i>											
1. Creating style	5.6	.7	5.7	3.2	7.0	(.86)					
2. Knowing style	5.5	.8	5.7	2.7	7.0	.32**	(.76)				
3. Planning style	5.5	.7	5.7	2.3	7.0	.25**	.54**	(.85)			
4. Perceived usefulness of SP process	4.6	1.1	4.8	1.0	7.0	.22**	.17**	.26**	(.91)		
5. Perceived ease of use of SP process	4.2	1.2	4.3	1.0	7.0	.18**	.15**	.12**	.54**	(.88)	
6. Commitment to strategic plan	4.8	.9	4.8	1.5	7.0	.27**	.17**	.26**	.52**	.32**	(.81)

Note:

^aAll calculations are Pearson correlations

^b0 = female; 1 = male

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Because the data were collected using a multistage survey whereby individuals (i.e. PTMs) are clustered in a higher-order group (i.e. municipalities) and the developed conceptual model contains latent variables, lavaan.survey (an R package) (Obersky, Nov. 2015, version 1.1.3) was used. Specifically, lavaan.survey constructs latent variable models while correcting for the clustered survey design by (a) ‘aggregating’ the structural equation model parameter estimates over any cluster (Skinner, Holt, and Smith 1989) and (b) adjusting the standard errors based on the design (Muthén and Satorra 1995). In the online appendix, section D, we discuss in detail the proportion of variability of the study’s variables that is between-cluster.

The latent variable model was developed using a two-step approach (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). In the first step we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the fit of the measurement model to the data. In the second step, we estimated the relationships between the constructs. Both the measurement and structural model were analyzed using a pseudo-maximum likelihood (PML) estimation with bootstrapping (5000 bootstrapped covariance matrices), as well as corrected estimates, standard errors, and chi-square-derived fit measures for the clustered survey design. Non-standardized parameter estimates of these relationships are reported because all measures have the same scale and using the measure’s original measurement unit facilitates interpretation.

Step 1. Psychometric properties of the measures: the measurement model

The survey-design adjusted chi-square of the multi factor measurement model is $\chi^2_{301}=505.87$ ($p < .0001$). Consequently, the normed chi-square is 1.68 and meets the criterion for acceptance (<5) (Schumacker and Lomax 2004). Although it has been argued that a positive chi-square could indicate that the model is unacceptable, other authors demonstrate that the chi square index is almost always statistically significant when using larger sample sizes and can be disregarded if the more sensitive fit statistics provide evidence of model fit (Hair, Black, and Babin 2010). Hair, Black, and Babin (2010) advise, for models with $N > 250$ and between 12 and 30 observed variables, that the following cut offs should be used to determine goodness-of-fit: $TLI \geq .92$, $RMSEA < .07$ (with $CFI \geq .92$) and $SRMR < .08$ (with $CFI \geq .92$). The constructed measurement model meets the required thresholds: $TLI = .95$, $RMSEA = .039$, $SRMR = .050$, $CFI = .95$.

After establishing an acceptable model fit, the measurement model was further tested for construct, convergent, discriminant and nomological validity.

First, we looked at construct validity. The included measures are believed to be related to their respective constructs because the loading of each factor is significantly different from zero and nontrivial (absolute standardized loadings > .60). In addition, all item factor loadings are significant (explained variance ranging from .35 to .85) while the average variance extracted and the construct reliability of each construct exceeds .50 and .60 respectively (Hair, Black, and Babin 2010). Second, evidence of convergent validity is provided via the significant size of the completely standardized factor loadings ([.59, .92], average $\lambda = .74$) (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Third, regarding discriminant validity, all constructs are believed to measure different concepts because the largest bivariate correlation (.66) is below the .85 threshold (Kenny 2012). In addition, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) discriminant validity test and a collapsed factor discriminant validity test provide further proof of the constructs' discriminant validity. Moreover, multicollinearity does not seem to be an issue given the low average bivariate correlation of .33 and the fact that no measure shares more than 34% of its variance while the calculated variance inflation factors does not exceed 1.5. Fourth, the fact that the majority of the correlations between the constructs are positive, as expected based on theory, suggests nomological validity.

Step 2. Relationships between the latent variables: the structural model

The significance and strength of each of the hypothesized effects was analyzed in a structural model which indicates that the developed model accurately captures the pattern of relationships found in the data: $\chi^2_{304} = 519.51$, $p < .0001$, CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .06 (see Step 1 for interpretation and cut offs). To gain a better understanding of the possible mediations in the proposed structural model, bootstrap bias corrected confidence intervals (5000 samples) were used to determine the significance of the indirect effects within the multiple mediation path analytic model. Specifically, where the confidence interval does not cross zero, a significant indirect association is assumed (Preacher and Hayes 2008). Table 25 reports the unstandardized estimates and confidence intervals of the conducted mediation tests including both direct and indirect effects.

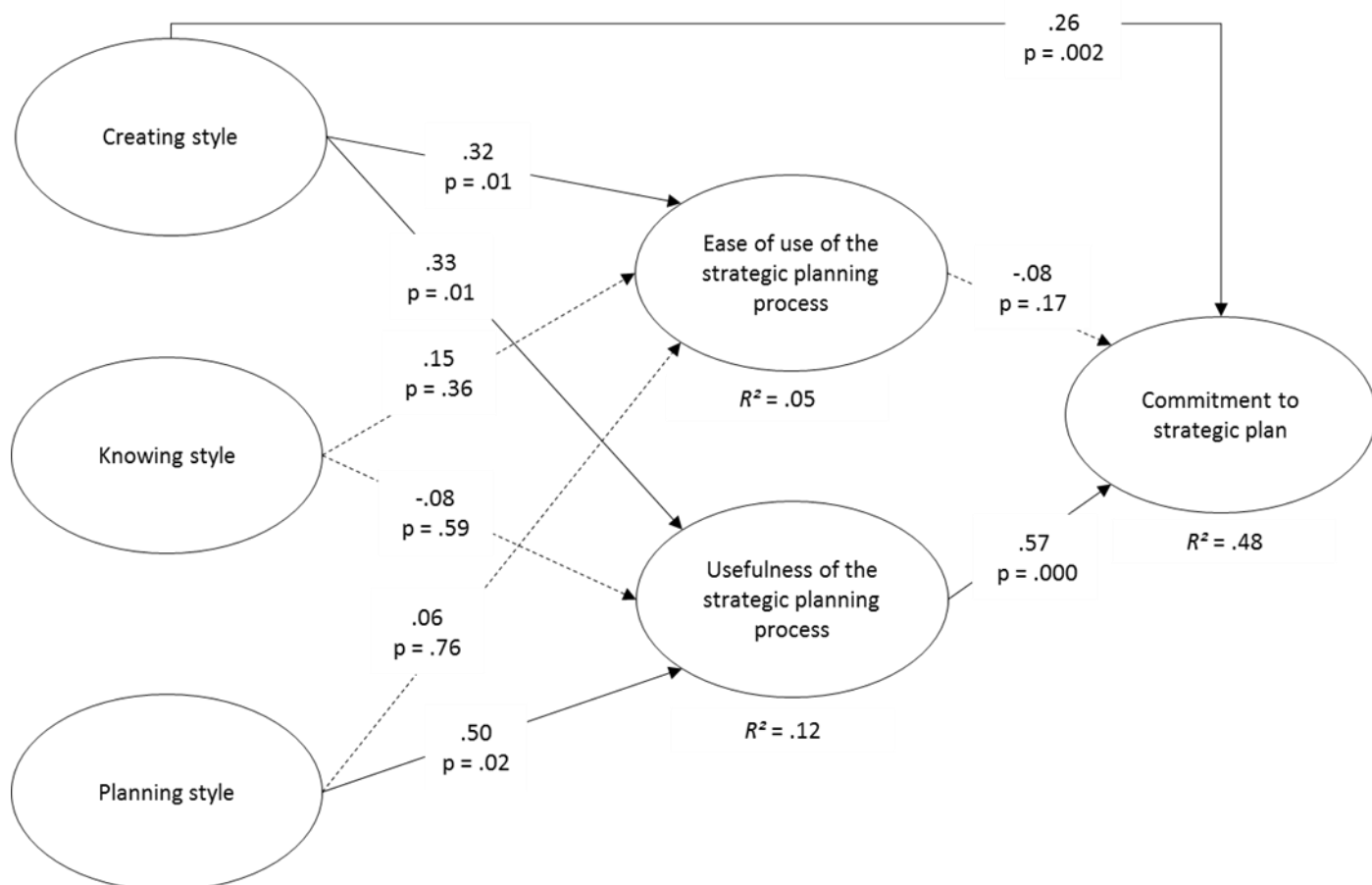
Table 25: Unstandardized estimates and confidence interval limits for the mediation tests

Path	Direct effect			Indirect effect			Total effect		
	<i>b(SE)</i>	95% CI	Sign.	<i>b(SE)</i>	95% CI	Sign.	<i>b(SE)</i>	95% CI	Sign.
Crea → Eas → Com	.261 (.08)	[.094, .428]	.002	-.024 (.02)	[-.063, .015]	.228	.422 (.11)	[.214, .629]	.000
Crea → Use → Com	.261 (.08)	[.094, .428]	.002	.185 (.07)	[.041, .328]	.012	.422 (.11)	[.214, .629]	.000
Kno → Eas → Com	-	-	-	-.011 (.01)	[-.038, .015]	.410	-.054 (.08)	[-0.210, .101]	.49
Kno → Use → Com	-	-	-	-.043 (.08)	[-.210, .118]	.581	-.054 (.08)	[-0.210, .101]	.49
Pla → Eas → Com	-	-	-	-.004 (.014)	[-.032, .023]	.766	.279 (.126)	[.032, .527]	.027
Pla → Use → Com	-	-	-	.283 (.134)	[.021, .545]	.034	.279 (.126)	[.032, .527]	.027

Although the hypothesized model (see Fig. 7) contained six possible mediations, the mediation test results (Table 25) confirm only two of them. The findings indicate that usefulness fully mediates the relationship between a planning style and plan commitment, while it partially mediates the relationship between a creating style and plan commitment. Consequently, as shown in Figure 8, the hypothesized structural model was extended with a direct relation between a creating style and plan commitment.

The model fit indexes suggest that the revised structural model is accurate (CFI = .95, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .039, SRMR = .051, $\chi^2_{303} = 507.60$, $p < .0001$) and (marginally) outperforms the original model. Figure 8 presents the parameter estimates for the final structural model as unstandardized regression weights and the explained variance of the endogenous variables.

Figure 8: Final structural model



The results confirm the assumption that PTMs' cognitive style are related with perceived ease of use and usefulness of the SP process. The findings indicate that a creating style has a direct positive association (as

opposed to the hypothesized direct negative association in H1 and H2) with both ease of use (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [.08, .56], point estimate of $b = .32$, $p < .05$) and usefulness (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [.10, .56], point estimate of $b = .33$, $p < .01$). We did not find support for H3 and H4 as the findings indicate that a knowing style had no direct association with either ease of use (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [-.17, .46], point estimate of $b = .15$, $p = .36$) nor usefulness (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [-.36, .21], point estimate of $b = -.08$, $p = .59$). The results also indicate that a planning style had no direct association with ease of use (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [-.29, .40], point estimate of $b = .05$, $p = .76$) (rejection of H5) but confirms the direct positive association with usefulness (H6) (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [.09, .91], point estimate of $b = .50$, $p < .05$). Usefulness, in turn, has a direct positive association with plan commitment (acceptance of H8) (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [.42, .71], point estimate of $b = .57$, $p < .0001$) while the relationship between ease of use and plan commitment proves to be insignificant (rejection of H7) (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [-.19, .03], point estimate of $b = -.08$, $p = .17$).

The analyses furthermore indicate that the revised structural model contains two mediations. First, perceived usefulness of the SP process fully mediates the relationship between a planning style and plan commitment (95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [.02, .55], point estimate of $b = .28$, $p < .05$). Second, perceived usefulness of the SP process partially mediates the relationship between a creating style and plan commitment (indirect effect: 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [.04, .33], point estimate of $b = .18$, $p < .05$, direct association between a creating style and plan commitment: 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [.09, .43], point estimate of $b = .26$, $p < .01$).

7.5. Discussion

We contributed to the debate on SP's effectiveness in public organizations by addressing the call for more micro-level research in the context of public SP (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). Specifically, we examined two individual-level determinants of PTMs' commitment to strategic plans, namely PTMs' cognitive style and their acceptance of SP. More insights into individual characteristics that are associated with plan commitment is crucial because plan commitment is considered to be a key process output of SP that precedes successful plan implementation (Olson, Parayitam, and Bao 2007). We hypothesized that a

(mis)fit between PTMs' cognitive information-processing style and the systematic, analytic and rational SP process is associated with SP acceptance, which in turn influences plan commitment. We found partial support for our hypotheses, although not all results provided support for the expected information-processing fit perspective.

We found that it is highly relevant to focus on user acceptance in the context of the implementation of SP within public organizations. The importance of user acceptance is illustrated through the positive relation between PTMs' perceived usefulness of the SP process and their commitment to the strategic plan (H8). As hypothesized, PTMs who consider the SP process useful for the performance of their municipality, are more likely to indicate that they are committed to implement the plan. Interestingly enough, the same rationale does not apply to PTMs' perceived ease of use of the SP process (H7). This finding is relevant for public organizations because previous research illustrated that the adoption of SP requires time, technical expertise and organizational resources and SP processes are inherently difficult to adopt and execute (George and Desmidt 2014, Boyne et al. 2002). However, the difficult nature of SP does not necessarily impede the commitment of PTMs to implement the resulting strategic plan. What seems to be more important is whether these PTMs find that the SP process is likely to increase the performance of their organization. In this sense, we recommend governments and municipalities to organize 'plan for planning' sessions before the actual initiation of SP, during which they can stress arguments related to the usefulness of SP for the performance of the organizations at hand (Bryson 2011, George, Desmidt, and De Moyer 2016).

Looking at the influence of PTMs' individual cognitive style on their acceptance of SP, we found that PTMs with a creating style are more likely to find the SP process both easy to use and useful, PTMs with a planning style are more likely to find the SP process useful whereas a knowing style is not significantly related to ease of use nor usefulness of the SP process. These findings – some of which are counter to our theoretical argument – could mirror the specific character of SP processes in a public-sector setting versus a private-sector setting. Specifically, in private organizations the adoption of SP might be the result of fad and fashion, advice from consultants or mimetic/normative isomorphism but typically leaves ample flexibility to adapt the process and its output to the specific organizational context (Abrahamson 1991, Wolf and Floyd 2013). In the public sector, however, the adoption of SP is in many cases the result of a change in procedures

enforced by law (e.g. Best Value in the United Kingdom, Government Performance and Results Act in the US) – which includes a structured timeframe, process as well as output. We draw on this distinctiveness throughout our further discussion.

The results for the creating style are in the opposite direction of our hypothesized negative relations (H1 and H2). In our research setting SP was a change in planning procedures put forth by the Flemish Government. Creators could thus have been motivated by the novelties of this procedural change because, due to their preference for continuous change and novelty, they are known to be ‘change champions’, who are proficient in swiftly understanding the technicalities underlying a procedure (Cools and Van den Broeck 2007, Armstrong, Cools, and Sadler-Smith 2012). It thus seems that creators’ positive attitude towards change carried more weight than the expected cognitive misfit with SP’s rational nature (Chakraborty, Hu, and Cui 2008). While creators seem to be crucial change champions of SP when it is introduced as a procedural change in public organizations, the challenge will be to ensure that these creators remain supportive once the procedural change becomes a standardized routine in the managerial toolbox of the organization.

The results for a planning style support our argument that planners are more likely to accept SP processes because of the fit between the systematic nature of SP and their own preference for structured and organized decision-making (Bryson 2011, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). This finding, however, is limited to PTMs’ perceived usefulness (H6) and does not apply to PTMs’ perceived ease of use (H5). Again, the underlying reason for this finding could lie in the specific context of SP in Flemish municipalities. People with a planning style are not fond of change in general and hence are reluctant towards the burden that implementing this change in planning procedures might bring, irrespective of the fact that they do consider SP useful for their organization (Cools and Van den Broeck 2008). The fact that the procedural change will first require planners to organize themselves differently might result in the perception that SP is not a ‘change in chewable bites’ hence clarifying the non-significant link with ease of use (Kemp, Funk, and Eadie 1993). In this sense, it will be important to convince PTMs with a planning style that the SP process will not only be useful, but, in the long run, also easy to use even though

it will require some initial effort. Focusing on the 'natural' fit between SP and planners' preferred information-processing style can help in building convincing arguments.

The non-significant results for a knowing style contrast with the hypothesized positive relation between knowing and SP acceptance (H3 and H4). A knowing style is typically associated with a preference for analysis and rationality, which at first sight seems to correspond well with the nature of SP (Bryson 2011, Poister, Pasha, and Edwards 2013, Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). However, knowers' preference for lengthy analysis and intellectual freedom could hold a potential pitfall. Specifically, the procedural change underlying SP in Flemish municipalities contains strict timeframes and a request to include specific structured output (George, Desmidt, and De Moyer 2016). First, it is possible that PTMs with a knowing style find this timeframe to be insufficient for the in-depth analysis of data that constitutes their favored approach to decision-making (Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). Hence, if knowers are not given the time to execute their lengthy analysis during SP, it is likely that they find the SP process to lack a thorough analytical dimension. Second, knowers prefer intellectual challenges and the necessary intellectual freedom (Cools and Van den Broeck 2007). The predefined and structured output might seem too restrictive for them, in the sense that they lack the intellectual freedom to approach SP as they would prefer to (Cools and Van den Broeck 2007, 2008). The question that thus remains is how SP can leave ample flexibility for the type of intellectual and thorough contributions and analyses that would stimulate the knowers in the planning team.

Finally, apart from the relation between (a) user acceptance and plan commitment and (b) cognitive styles and user acceptance, we also found evidence for the mediating role of PTMs' perceived usefulness of the SP process. Specifically, our findings indicate that creators and planners are more likely to illustrate a behavioral intent to implement strategic plans because they perceive SP as a useful procedural change which will enhance the performance of their organization (Davis 1989, Hess, McNab, and Basoglu 2014). Both planners and creators thus prove to be essential PTMs when SP is introduced as a procedural change in public organizations because they can become the guiding coalition and champions who promote the strategic plan during its implementation throughout the organization (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). Nevertheless, the challenge lies in also convincing PTMs with a knowing style to champion the strategic plan

because their lack of commitment might stimulate resistance within the organization during implementation.

7.6. Limitations

Four limitations of our study need to be taken into account. First, we focused on one aspect and unit of analysis of public SP, namely individual PTMs. Other aspects and units of analysis such as SP process characteristics, organizational characteristics and planning team characteristics can also influence SP in public organizations (Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009, George and Desmidt 2014, Armstrong, Cools, and Sadler-Smith 2012). Second, our study employs cross-sectional data drawn from one self-report survey. We are thus limited to associative relations and issues of common source bias cannot be completely ruled out (Favero and Bullock 2014). Third, although our sampling procedure was aimed at identifying expert informants, respondent bias could be an issue because we only survey individuals 'responsible' for plan formulation. Fourth, our analysis might suffer from omitted variable bias because we did not include controls in our model. Future research could address these limitations. Multilevel studies could incorporate individual-level, team-level and organizational-level variables in the same model. Additionally, studies could include archival and survey-based data or use experimental methods to avoid common source bias. Longitudinal studies could also provide insights into the evolution of user acceptance towards SP based on SP's lifecycle. Studies could also look at other employee groups (e.g. lower-level staff or professionals) and identify whether our findings hold or might differ depending on the proximity of an individual to the SP process. Finally, drawing on the initial findings of our study, future follow-up qualitative studies can help to elucidate and fine-grain the theoretical underpinnings of an information-processing model of SP.

7.7. Conclusion

Our study complements the current organizational-level, performance-oriented and Anglo-Saxon focus of empirical studies on SP in public organizations. Specifically, we illustrate how strategic plans in Flemish municipalities can receive the necessary commitment needed for successful implementation. We argue that this commitment is, in part, contingent upon the match between the individual characteristics of PTMs

and the characteristics of the SP process. Our study thus suggests that a micro-perspective on public SP - which takes into account the actual practitioners underlying SP processes - has rightly been singled out as a crucial research avenue to understand why plans succeed or fail in public organizations. We conclude that within this micro-perspective both cognitive styles and user acceptance are relevant individual-level determinants of commitment to strategic plans.

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CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The doctoral manuscript at hand offers empirical evidence on the relation between strategic planning and strategic decision-making in public organizations, both at the individual and organizational level. Given the contradiction between the ubiquitous nature of strategic planning in the public sector and the ongoing debate on whether strategic planning actually “works”, a series of literature reviews and empirical studies were executed to (a) identify whether strategic planning, at the macro level, contributes to strategic decision-making in public organizations and (b) which characteristic of strategic planning, at the micro level, accounts for said contribution. In this conclusion, I first discuss the theoretical and practical implications of my doctoral manuscript. Additionally, I offer some limitations and argue how future research could address these limitations. Finally, I draw on expert interviews with a select set of stakeholders to summarize some concluding remarks on the findings of my manuscript.

8.1. Theoretical implications

The manuscript initially set out to offer four main contributions to the strategic planning and public management literature: **(a)** incorporate a theory-driven approach, **(b)** focus on the process outcomes of public-sector strategic planning, **(c)** assess strategic planning as a practice within public organizations and **(d)** include individual-oriented studies. First, throughout the empirical papers as well as literature reviews, the manuscript indicates that theory can be used to derive meaningful hypotheses on the contribution of strategic planning to strategic decision-making. Such theories have focused on the process characteristics of strategic planning (i.e. rationality and participation) as well as the characteristics of the practitioners involved in strategic planning (i.e. group dynamics, blame avoidance and cognitive style). Interestingly enough, not all theory-driven hypotheses are supported by the empirical evidence – thus indicating the necessity of a further refinement of these theories to ensure their applicability to strategic planning in public organizations. Nevertheless, by incorporating **different theoretical frameworks**, this manuscript clearly offers useful insights for future theory-driven and hypotheses-testing strategic planning studies to build on (Wolf and Floyd 2013).

Second, both the literature reviews as well as the empirical studies elucidate strategic planning's impact on **proximate, process-related outcomes**. The literature reviews draw on previously published studies to indicate that strategic planning in public organizations has indeed been linked to, for instance, shared understanding of strategies and improved coordination. Similarly, the empirical studies illustrate that strategic planning can be positively related to strategic decision outcomes (i.e. quality and commitment) in public organizations. The positive contribution of strategic planning to these proximate, process-related outcomes indicates that the effectiveness of public-sector strategic planning might be best assessed by incorporating a multidimensional approach – including both proximate and distal outcomes as well as the potential mediating relation underlying these two outcomes. Indeed, proximate, process-related outcomes have been linked to, for instance, successful strategy implementation and indicators of organizational performance (Yang, Sun, and Eppler 2009) – and should thus not be discarded by strategic planning and public management scholars.

Third, the manuscript aimed to address the call of leading public-sector strategic planning scholars by looking at strategic planning as a practice, something public organization **“do”** as opposed to **“have”** (Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010, Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson 2009). The two literature reviews incorporated into this manuscript indeed illustrate how strategic planning has emerged within public organizations – namely through complex interactions between planning processes, different practitioners as well as strategy tools and documents. These studies indicate that any one theory does not suffice to exhaustively describe the practice that is strategic planning within the public sector. If anything these studies show how different dimensions underlie strategic planning and each dimension might require a different theory to derive meaningful hypotheses on strategic planning's impact. Future studies can clearly build on these insights by complementing the often mechanic operationalization of strategic planning – typically centered on its analytical nature – and investigating different dimensions of strategic planning processes (e.g. participatory nature, creativity tools, group processes) as identified by the literature reviews.

Fourth, the manuscript sought to complement the predominant organizational focus of empirical studies on public-sector strategic planning by investigating the **actual individuals** involved in planning processes. In doing so, the manuscript clearly contributes to broader evolutions within public management

scholarship. Specifically, investigations into the individual-level impact of public management processes using theories and methods from psychology and organizational behavior have been called for by the Behavioral Public Administration movement (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2016). The manuscript found that group processes in planning teams, the manner in which politicians use strategic planning information and the psychological characteristics of planning team members all have a crucial role to play in order to elucidate the effectiveness of strategic planning processes within the public sector. These findings further support the necessity of incorporating a **Behavioral Strategic Planning-approach** in future research as it seems that, in its very nature, strategic planning is organizational behavior. In what follows, I offer a deep dive into the specific theoretical contributions of the macro and micro sections of this manuscript and conclude with the overarching theoretical implications.

MACRO LEVEL (CHAPTERS TWO, THREE AND FOUR)

The first three papers of this doctoral manuscript contribute to Contingency Theory, Rational Planning Theory, Information Processing Theory and Blame Avoidance Theory. First, one of the central arguments of **Contingency Theory** is that both internal and external contingencies matter in order to understand the effectiveness of management processes in public organizations (Donaldson 2001). Similarly, both Bryson, Berry, and Yang (2010) and Poister, Pitts, and Edwards (2010) indicate the importance of a contingency perspective on strategic planning and management to identify what works and in which context. **Chapter two** indeed indicates that a variety of internal and external contingencies have impacted the adoption of rational planning practices by public organizations. Moreover, chapter two illustrates that some internal and external contingencies are even directly related to planning outcomes and can thus not be disregarded if we want to understand planning's effectiveness in public organizations. This argument is further supported by **chapter three**, which indicates that not all rational planning practices necessarily "work" in all types of public organizations. Specifically, performance measurement failed to reach significance in the multivariate linear regression model, which is arguably due to the organizational context in which data was gathered (i.e. Flemish pupil guidance centers).

Second, **Rational Planning Theory** argues that the rational planning cycle of formulating plans through strategic planning, implementing plans through performance measurement and evaluation plans through performance management offers a framework for strategic decision-making within organizations – thus resulting in qualitative, informed strategic decisions (Elbanna 2006, Boyne 2001). This hypothesis is indeed partially supported by the evidence presented in chapters three and four. **Chapter three** identifies that strategic planning and performance management are positively associated with strategic-decision quality in Flemish pupil guidance centers. Additionally, **chapter four** indicates that strategic goals defined through strategic planning offer a framework for political decision-making as politicians are, on average, likely to assign more budget to a policy domain when said domain is indicated as a strategic goal of their organization. Some nuance is, however, necessary as the impact of performance measurement is non-significant in chapter three and follows a blame avoidance logic in chapter four (cf. *infra*).

Third, **Information Processing Theory** argues that, apart from rational planning practices, individuals and teams also have an information-processing capability that can contribute to strategic decision-making within organizations (Daft, Bettenhausen, and Tyler 1993). Specifically, decision-makers need to exchange information during strategic decision-making in order to make informed and qualitative strategic decisions because each individual holds a specific piece of the decision-making puzzle (e.g. financial knowledge, HR knowledge, client knowledge...) (Olson, Parayitam, and Bao 2007). In order to facilitate said information exchange, decision-makers need to be encouraged to participate in decision-making through the procedures used for decision-making and through the interpersonal treatment within the decision-making group (Kim and Mauborgne 1993). **Chapter three** supports this hypothesis. Controlling for rational planning practices, average team size, average team tenure and resource scarcity, the study finds that procedural justice of the decision-making process (i.e. a measure of information exchange through procedures and interpersonal treatment) is the strongest predictor of strategic-decision quality in Flemish pupil guidance centers. Chapter three thus offers empirical evidence that individuals and teams cannot be disregarded if we are to comprehend the predictors of qualitative strategic decision-making in the public sector.

Fourth, **Blame Avoidance Theory** offers a theoretical framework that helps elucidate potential reactions of politicians towards performance information (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015). Specifically, Blame Avoidance

Theory argues that politicians do not necessarily react to such information in a logic, managerial manner but rather react based on the potential blame or glory that results from the information (Moynihan 2012, Hood 2011). Thus, when confronted with information on bad performance, politicians look to make decisions that show the public they are actively trying to tackle the problem. Similarly, when confronted with information on good performance, politicians seek to maintain the status quo in their decision-making processes (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015). **Chapter four** confirms these hypotheses. Based on a randomized survey experiment, chapter four indicates that politicians who are confronted with information on low performance assign more budget to the low performing domain because assigning budget is the easiest way to show the public they are actively trying to tackle the problem. Additionally, chapter four indicates that politicians who are confronted with information on high performance are reluctant towards reforming the high-performing domain as the status quo already illustrates high performance and reform holds potential risks.

MICRO LEVEL (CHAPTERS FIVE, SIX AND SEVEN)

The second three papers of this doctoral manuscript contribute to Rational Planning Theory, Integrative Stakeholder Participation Theory and Information Processing Theory. First, **Rational Planning Theory** argues that a systematic, analytic and rational approach to strategy formulation (i.e. formal strategic planning) is beneficial to public organizations because this approach results in qualitative, informed strategic decisions (Andrews et al. 2009, Boyne 2001, Walker and Boyne 2006, Elbanna 2006). Chapters five and six partially confirm this hypothesis, while also offering some nuance. In **chapter five**, the vast majority of reviewed studies indicate a relation between the adoption of a formal strategic planning process and some sort of beneficial outcome in public organizations. Importantly, these studies draw on both quantitative and qualitative research designs, which implies that the uncovered relationship is confirmed by mixed research evidence. However, chapter five also indicates that Rational Planning Theory, as a theoretical framework, is not enough to understand why strategic planning is beneficial – and an activity-based framework such as **Strategy-as-Practice** might be better fit for this job. In **chapter six**, the relation between formal strategic planning and strategic-decision quality is empirically tested based on evidence in 89 Flemish municipalities. Chapter six uncovers **two dimensions** in the formal strategic planning scale,

namely a systematic and analytic dimension, and only the systematic dimension has a significant positive relation with strategic-decision quality. This finding conflicts with Rational Planning Theory and incites some further inquiry into the effort, expertise, time, resources and training necessary to truly execute an analytic strategic planning process (Boyne and Gould-Williams 2003).

Second, **Integrative Stakeholder Participation Theory** argues that the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders during strategic planning processes is beneficial for public organizations (Hendrick 2003). Specifically, public organizations are argued to be “service-dominant” organizations, in which strategic planning is a process of strategic orientation, which implies the search for a fit between the expectations of service users (e.g. citizens) and the internal capacity of public organizations (e.g. resources) (Bryson, Berry, and Yang 2010, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010). Hence, through stakeholder participation, the strategic planning process “generates basic information about current and future needs that can then support policy formulation and implementation” (Osborne, Radnor, and Nasi 2013, 142). Chapters five and six confirm this hypothesis. In **chapter five**, the reviewed studies indicate that one of the core beneficial characteristics of strategic planning in public organizations is the extent to which internal and external stakeholders are involved in the process. Although such an involvement adds a complexity to the process (Hendrick 2003), the current evidence derived from both quantitative and qualitative studies indicates that the “juice is well worth the squeeze”. In **chapter six**, the relation between stakeholder participation during strategic planning and strategic-decision quality is empirically tested based on evidence in 89 Flemish municipalities. Chapter six uncovers that both the participation of top policymakers and managers (e.g. mayor, aldermen, city manager) as well as lower-level staff and external stakeholders is significantly associated with higher strategic-decision quality, thus also confirming Integrative Stakeholder Participation Theory.

Third, **Information Processing Theory**, as indicated supra, argues that both individuals, teams and organizational processes have an information-processing capability that contributes to strategic decision-making in organizations (Daft, Bettenhausen, and Tyler 1993). Additionally, Information Processing Theory also argues the importance of a fit between the individual, as an information-processing system, and the organizational information-processing system that is used by said individual (Simon 1973). Specifically, this implies that the cognitive style of the individual system user (i.e. how the individual prefers to process

information) is related to the extent to which this user accepts the system (i.e. finds the system easy to use and useful), which, in turn, results in the behavioral intent to use the system in practice (Hess, McNab, and Basoglu 2014, Armstrong, Cools, and Sadler-Smith 2012). Based on this theory, one can expect that when the cognitive style of a planning team member (i.e. the “users” of strategic planning) fits the systematic, analytic and rational nature of strategic planning, the team member is more likely to accept the planning process, which, in turn, implies that the team member is more likely to be committed to implement the strategic plan. **Chapter seven** only partially supports the hypothesized information-processing fit perspective. Specifically, chapter seven indicates that planning team members with a **planning cognitive style** are indeed likely to find the strategic planning process useful, which, in turn, is indeed positively related to their intent to implement the plan. However, planning team members with a **creating cognitive style**, who one would not expect to be favorable towards strategic planning because of their preference for intuitive, gut-feeling decision-making, are likely to find the strategic planning process both easy to use and useful and are also likely to be committed to implement the plan. This finding contradicts the hypothesized information-processing fit perspective, and seems to fit more within the innovation adoption literature (e.g. Saeed, Yun, and Sinnappan 2009, Chakraborty, Hu, and Cui 2008).

OVERARCHING THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The concluding element of this section aims to offer the readers an **integration** of the different theoretical frameworks underlying this manuscript: How do these frameworks fit with the strategic planning approaches formulated by Bryson (2015)? What are the weaknesses and strengths of these frameworks and how do these interconnect? Table 26 offers an overview of these questions and their subsequent answer.

Table 26: Assessment of theoretical frameworks

Theory	Chapter(s)	Approach	Strengths	Weaknesses	Evidence
Strategy-as practice	2 & 5	All	Sense-making mechanism, practitioner-oriented and multidimensional.	No hypothesis testing, very constructivist and inductive.	n/a
Information processing theory	3 & 7	Strategic planning systems	System thinking, linking individual, team and process (multilevel).	Bounded rationality, no insight into prioritization mechanisms.	Mixed
Blame avoidance theory	4	Strategic issues management approaches	Centered on political decision-making, incorporates role of media.	“Negative” outlook, impact on unwanted/perverved behavior.	Mixed
Integrative stakeholder participation theory	6	Stakeholder management approaches	Strong fit with New Public Governance and core public values.	Feasibility of stakeholder involvement and lack of categorization.	Positive
Rational planning theory	6	Harvard policy model	Internal and external focus, develop best ‘fit’ with environment.	Mechanistic perspective, vulnerable to typical criticisms (Mintzberg).	Mixed

Table 26 illustrates a recent conceptualization of strategic planning by Bryson (2015, 515): “strategic planning is not a single thing, but is instead a set of concepts, procedures, and tools that must be carefully tailored to situations if desirable outcomes are to be achieved”. Said conceptualization also underlies the **strategy-as-practice movement**, which does not unilaterally incorporate one specific approach to strategic planning but rather defines the characteristics of strategic planning by looking at how planning emerges in practice (Vaara and Whittington 2012). Thus, strategy-as-practice is, by nature, a practitioner-oriented framework and helps to strengthen the ties between academic insight and valuable practical knowledge by

making sense of theoretical findings (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). The weakness of strategy-as-practice, however, lies in its inability to explain causal mechanisms underlying characteristics of strategic planning and beneficial outcomes. Indeed, strategy-as-practice helps to categorize findings into a clear framework, but seems inapplicable as a framework for hypotheses-testing – for this it requires a connection to other theoretical frameworks (Johnson et al. 2007). As such, my manuscript incorporates four other theoretical frameworks aimed at addressing this weakness of strategy-as-practice.

The first two theories are incorporated to define hypotheses that center on the behavior of practitioners during strategic planning. **Information-processing theory** is used because of its system-approach, which implies that both the individual, the planning team and the planning process are considered information-processing systems that are interconnected (Daft, Bettenhausen, and Tyler 1993, Simon 1973). To understand the information-processing capabilities of strategic planning, we thus need to understand the information-processing capabilities of the underlying individuals, teams and processes. The findings in my manuscript indeed support this argument – but also offer the nuance that a seemingly (mis)fit between the information-processing characteristics of individuals and of the planning process might matter less than argued by information-processing theory. Although information-processing theory offers relevant insights, its weakness lies in its inability to explain “how” individuals and particularly politicians might deal with information. Specifically, since Herbert Simon the concept of bounded rationality has become well-known within behavioral science – cognitive and time-related limits force individuals to prioritize information based on what they believe are important “issues”(Jones 2003) .

Blame avoidance theory is a potent framework to explain which issues are particularly important for politicians and how politicians might thus react to information during or resulting from planning processes (Moynihan 2012). As is apparent in my manuscript, blame avoidance is particularly fitting to explain how politicians deal with performance information but did not seem to matter that much when assessing the role of the strategic goals mentioned in strategic plans. Although blame avoidance can help to elucidate how politicians deal with planning information (Nielsen and Baekgaard 2015), its weakness lies in the “negative” causal mechanism it seeks to explain. Indeed, the question that might emerge is how blame

avoidance strategies – when these oppose evidence as well as public values – can be minimized in political decision-making processes.

The second set of theories are incorporated to define hypotheses that center on “how” public organizations use strategic planning: Systematically, analytically and/or in a participatory manner? **Integrative stakeholder participation theory** is incorporated to define hypotheses on the role of participation during strategic planning – which is very fitting to a stakeholder-centric approach to strategic planning (Hendrick 2003). Moreover, participation has arguably become one of the core values of New Public Governance – where network governance, co-production, cooperation and citizen engagement are keywords (Koppenjan 2012). The manuscript clearly supports this approach to strategic planning – both based on original data as well as already published studies. However, whereas integrative stakeholder participation indicates benefits of participatory planning processes, it does not indicate “how” public organization can organize stakeholder participation or prioritize stakeholders through, for instance, power/interest-matrixes (Bryson 2004).

Rational planning theory is incorporated to define hypotheses on the systematic and analytic dimension of strategic planning processes – arguing that these two dimensions generate benefits for public organizations (Boyne 2001). Systematically analyzing the organization’s internal and external environment has historically been at the core of many operationalizations of strategic planning, supported by the popularity of the Harvard policy model (Bryson 2015). It is exactly this dimension of planning that has been strongly criticized by the likes of Mintzberg (1994) – arguing that an overreliance on analysis limits creativity and strategic thinking. The findings of the manuscript seemingly support this criticism as the analytical dimension of strategic planning proved to be insignificant. However, other approaches to strategic planning exist, as indicated above, and simply “throwing the baby out with the bathwater” seems preliminary.

Conclusively, it seems that much of the criticism on strategic planning has been centered on its one-sided, mechanical operationalization in some empirical studies – strongly drawing on the Harvard policy model-approach to strategic planning (Bryson 2015). This operationalization is, however, reminiscent of **Kaplan’s (1964) proverbial hammer**: Because the analytical aspects of strategic planning are most familiar, we

unilaterally focus on this aspect when measuring strategic planning. I must admit that I have also been victim to the proverbial “strategic planning equals analysis”-hammer. Throughout my manuscript I have defined strategic planning as being systematic, analytic and rational. While, as is apparent in Table 26, strategic planning is not any one “thing”. Indeed, it can be reasonably systematic and analytic, but also intuitive, creative and participatory. I would thus strongly encourage future studies on public-sector strategic planning to free themselves from the proverbial planning hammer – and look into the **different theoretical approaches to strategic planning** offered by Bryson (2015) as well as how these approaches generate beneficial outcomes for public organizations.

8.2. Practical implications

MACRO LEVEL (CHAPTERS TWO, THREE AND FOUR)

What can practitioners learn from chapter two? Chapter two presents, apart from several theoretical contributions, a set of “best practices” based on previous research when formulating, implementing and evaluating plans in public organizations. These can be structured as follows:

- *Plan formulation:*
 - Define and communicate upfront guidelines before initiating the plan formulation process.
 - Perform a feasibility assessment of proposed strategies to ensure financial viability.
 - Identify and define performance measures that are linked to the strategic plan.
 - Include a variety of internal and external stakeholders in the plan formulation process.
 - Clarify top/middle manager roles (e.g. presence of process champion and sponsor).
 - Ensure positive attitudes towards the process (e.g. perceived simplicity).
 - Ensure positive attitudes during the process (e.g. openness to participation).
 - Appoint a plan formulation team with the necessary expertise and experience.
 - Incorporate benchmarking as an instrument during the plan formulation process.
- *Plan implementation:*

- Align all operations, management and decision-making in the organization with the strategic plan so that the plan can become a lively document within the organization.
 - Define objectives for department heads and other managers based on the strategic plan.
 - Link resources in the budget to the strategic plan to ensure that the necessary resources are allocated to strategic initiatives.
 - Formally appoint ownership of elements of the strategic plan to specific middle or top managers.
 - Maintain support from influential external stakeholders throughout the implementation phase.
 - Operationalize the strategic plan into department level strategic plans and project level action plans.
 - Develop and implement a management information system that tracks progress on elements of the strategic plan.
- *Plan evaluation:*
- Establish some form of formal monitoring process for revisiting the strategic plan. Such a process takes into account internal and external data and enables you to adequately react to changes in the environment that perhaps require updates of the strategic plan.
 - Base annual evaluations of senior and middle management on their achievement of or added-value for elements of the strategic plan.
 - Publicly and internally communicate on the achievement of performance measures linked to the plan to ensure accountability and transparency.

What can practitioners learn from chapter three? Although not as extensive as chapter two, there are still some interesting lessons for practitioners based on the empirical findings in Flemish pupil guidance centers.

These include:

- Take into account your organizational context when adopting rational planning practices. Do you have the necessary resources, performance-oriented culture, experience and expertise to develop strategic plans and performance measures?

- Even in a context where services are “hard to measure” and where there is no extensive performance-oriented culture, the formulation of strategies through strategic planning and the linking of those strategies to employee objectives through performance management has beneficial effects. This indicates that strategic planning and performance management are not just instruments aimed at “harder” public organizations with more easy to measure output.
- Do not neglect the social dimension underlying strategic decision-making in your organization. When making strategic decisions, pay attention to the group processes within the decision-making team. Can information be openly exchanged? Are there procedures for appealing decisions, for ensuring that decisions are based on accurate information? What about the interpersonal treatment between decision-makers?

What can practitioners learn from chapter four? The randomized survey experiment incorporated into chapter four has some interesting lessons for practitioners who often deal with politicians and political decision-making. These include:

- When confronted with performance information, do not necessarily expect politicians to react based on performance-based budgeting (i.e. penalize weak performers by giving them less resources and reward strong performers by giving them more resources).
- If the domain for which performance information is provided is a salient domain, often mentioned in the media, it might be the case the politicians react to this information from a blame avoidance perspective.
- Such a perspective implies that politicians might be inclined to assign more budget to weak performers in order to illustrate to their constituents that they are actively trying to address the problem. Similarly, politicians might be reluctant to reform strong performing domains because the reform might shift the already positive status quo.
- Strategic goals indicated in the strategic plan of the organization also seem to have some influence on politicians’ spending preferences. As such, it might be useful for practitioners to use these strategic goals as a framework during negotiations and/or discussions with politicians in order to try to align, to some extent, political decision-making with the content of organizational plans.

MICRO LEVEL (CHAPTERS FIVE, SIX AND SEVEN)

What can practitioners learn from chapter five? Chapter five indicates that, based on our current research evidence, a formal and participatory strategic planning process is related to positive outcomes for public organizations. The study also provides some insights into which elements of such a formal and participatory strategic planning process are responsible for this relation. Some of these elements have already been mentioned in chapter two but for educational purposes are again presented here:

- *Practitioners of strategic planning processes:*
 - Assign a process sponsor and a process champion of the strategic planning process.
 - Ensure that top management and top policymakers support the strategic planning process.
 - Ensure an organization-wide support for the strategic planning process.
 - Utilize the expertise of an external consultant if necessary.
 - Ensure that practitioners have positive attitudes towards the planned strategic planning processes (e.g. is the process client-oriented?).
 - Ensure that practitioners have positive attitudes during the strategic planning process (e.g. openness to participation).
 - Ensure that planning team members have the necessary expertise and include members who are externally oriented (i.e. “networkers” who know the field).
- *Practices of strategic planning processes:*
 - Defining upfront strategic planning guidelines before the strategic planning process.
 - Conducting an environmental analysis during the strategic planning process.
 - Defining a vision for the future during the strategic planning process.
 - Defining strategic priorities during the strategic planning process.
 - Setting clear, realistic goals and objectives during the strategic planning process.
 - Conducting a financial feasibility assessment of the proposed strategies.
 - Developing actions plans related to the strategic goals.
 - Ensure widespread internal participation during strategic planning, including department heads and other senior managers as well as lower-level employees.

- Ensure widespread external participation during strategic planning, including for instance service users and labor unions.

What can practitioners learn from chapter six? In chapter six, data from 89 Flemish municipalities are used to test the relation between formal strategic planning, stakeholder participation during strategic planning and strategic-decision quality. The results confirm some of the best practices previously indicated but also offers some nuance:

- *Adopting a formal strategic planning process:*
 - Before embarking on the strategic planning process, organize a “plan the planning” session during which you ensure that all individuals involved agree upon the steps that will be followed during the process and that the output of the process should be a formal strategic plan (as opposed to a compliance document drafted to please authorities).
 - Simply “having” a SWOT-analysis does not necessarily imply that you have followed an analytic strategic planning process. Ensure that you have the necessary expertise, time, resources and training to organize a meaningful environmental analysis that identifies strategic issues for the organizations.
- *Organizing stakeholder participation during strategic planning:*
 - Two dimensions of stakeholders can be discerned: (a) top policymakers and managers and (b) lower-level staff and external stakeholders.
 - Both groups of stakeholders should be involved in the strategic planning process.
 - By involving top policymakers and managers, you ensure that the content of the strategic plan is aligned with the management style of the organization, which implies that it is easier to get the necessary support from the top layer of the organization.
 - Lower-level staff are typically the first point of contact between the organization and its service users. Hence, they are aware of the needs of said users and by involving them as well as external stakeholders in the strategic planning process you can ensure that your plan is client centric.

What can practitioners learn from chapter seven? In chapter seven, the actual planning team members of the strategic planning process in Flemish municipalities are scrutinized. The findings offer some practical relevance, especially for planning team composition:

- *Relation between user acceptance and commitment to the strategic plan:*
 - Whether planning team members consider the strategic planning process “easy to use” did not contribute to their commitment to implement the plan. What did contribute, however, is whether they find the strategic planning process “useful” for their organization.
 - Strategic planning is known to be messy, difficult, requires resources and expertise, and is thus not necessarily “easy to use”. This does not have to be a problem based on the findings, as long as planning team members consider strategic planning a worthwhile effort that is like to contribute to the performance of their organization.
 - Before initiating the strategic planning process, it could thus be helpful to indicate the potential benefits of strategic planning for your organization to all planning team members in order to ensure that as many members as possible are convinced of its usefulness.
- *Relation between cognitive styles, user acceptance and commitment to the strategic plan:*
 - Planning team members with a creating cognitive style (i.e. the early adopters, intuitive, creative and gut-feeling individuals) are likely to find the strategic planning process easy to use and useful and are also likely to be committed to implement the plan. Members with a planning style, who typically favor structure, time management, clear action plans, are likely to find the strategic planning process useful but not necessarily easy to use nor do they show a higher commitment to implement the plan. Members with a knowing style, who favor lengthy analysis and intellectual freedom, are not significantly related to ease of use, usefulness nor commitment to the plan.
 - These findings illustrate the importance of including individuals with a creating cognitive style in planning teams as these individuals can become the champions who support the implementation of the plan throughout the organization.

- Similarly, the findings also illustrate that change management initiatives might be useful to ensure that the knowers and planners are also on board with the process. For instance, sessions can be organized to ensure planners that the impact of the strategic planning process on their daily routine and/or way of working will be minimal or the impact will be worthwhile. Knowers can perhaps be convinced by asking their input in the structure of the process or the plan, giving them intellectual freedom to do what they believe is best, or by providing them with the necessary time to do thorough analyses.

8.3. Limitations and future research

Although the manuscript provides several insights into the effectiveness of strategic planning in public organizations, the selected research methods and scope statement do have some limitations. I first discuss the main methodological limitations of the papers. Next, I elaborate on the main limitations as a result of the selected scope statement and I conclude with some future research avenues that could help address these limitations.

LIMITATIONS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEWS (CHAPTERS 2 AND 5)

The main limitation when conducting a systematic literature review based on articles published in academic journals, is the file drawer problem (Rosenthal 1979). Basically, the file drawer problem implies that academic journals typically only publish articles that present significant findings whereas articles with null findings are rejected. Indeed, when scanning through the list of articles incorporated into the literature reviews, none exclusively present null findings and/or thoroughly discuss why null findings are present. By excluding these unpublished studies, it is likely that the reviews have some form of bias concerning the actual number and directions of cited relations (Walker and Andrews 2015). Recently, there have been calls from top public administration scholars to convince journals to also publish articles with null findings.⁹ However, as long as these initiatives are not widespread, the file drawer problem will remain an issue for all scholars who conduct systematic literature reviews based on published articles. A second important

⁹ See for instance the piece by Lars Tummers: <https://publicadministrationreview.org/speak-your-mind-article/> (consulted on 19-06-2016)

limitation should also be mentioned. The majority of the articles reviewed focus on a US or UK public sector setting, which implies that the evidence drawn from these studies might not necessarily be applicable to the continental European context. Public management context has indeed become a salient issue within public administration (e.g. O'Toole and Meier 2015) and one cannot just assume that what works in the US or the UK will also work in other country contexts. Quite obviously, this manuscript aims to address this problem by providing evidence from the Flemish public sector context.

LIMITATIONS OF THE CROSS SECTIONAL STUDIES (CHAPTERS 3, 6 AND 7)

The main limitation of the cross sectional studies is, logically, their cross sectional nature. All three chapters draw on a single source of information, namely a self-reported survey, at a single point in time. Due to the cross sectional nature of the data, statements based on these chapters should be limited to associations as no assumption of causality can be made (Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson 2012). Additionally, these chapters do suffer from common source bias, because both the dependent and independent variables are measured through the same self-reported surveys (Favero and Bullock 2014). The chapters do, however, contain many ex ante and ex post interventions to try to minimize the risk of common source bias (Jakobsen and Jensen 2014). But its existence can never be completely ruled out with this type of data. Moreover, the three chapters focus on (a) Flemish pupil guidance centers, (b) Flemish municipalities and (c) planning team members within Flemish municipalities. Although the high response rates do indicate that the findings are to some extent generalizable to the specific population of interest (i.e. Flemish pupil guidance centers, Flemish municipalities and planning team members within these municipalities), further replications in other public sector contexts are necessary to offer a broader generalization.

LIMITATIONS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL STUDY (CHAPTER 4)

Due to the innovative nature of the research design of chapter 4, the previously formulated limitations concerning causality and common source bias are no longer such an issue. Moreover, because this study includes a replication of a previously conducted experiment in Denmark and this replication confirms the two main Danish findings, the generalizability of this chapter to a broader population is more apparent. Nevertheless, the operational choices within the study do result in some important limitations worth

mentioning. First, because we expect Flemish city councilors to be aware of the strategic goals of their municipality, we cannot randomize this information. The insights on the relation between strategic goals and political decision-making are thus associative and not causal. Second, we operationalize political decision-making through politicians' preferences for spending and reform, which are of course not the only set of decisions politicians can make. Third, we focus on municipal education as a policy domain whereas other policy areas might be less salient and therefore less prone to the underlying blame-avoiding strategies.

LIMITATIONS AS A RESULT OF THE SELECTED SCOPE STATEMENT

The scope statement of this manuscript is indicated in chapter one. Due to the defined scope, the focus of the manuscript is strongly managerial and mostly draws on survey data gathered from managerial staff – with chapter four being the exception. As is apparent in chapter four, politicians might not necessarily follow a managerial logic in their decision-making processes. This manuscript, however, does not captivate the political decision-making processes that run parallel to the strategic planning process. While some evidence is provided in chapter four on how politicians react to information drawn from rational planning processes, little to no evidence is provided on how politicians perceive strategic plans and strategic planning processes (only about 6 % of the responding planning team members in Flemish municipalities had a political role). This does not imply that the political decision-making process does not exist or does not influence the strategic planning process (see *infra*, concluding remarks). It does, however, imply that not incorporating the impact of political documents (e.g. coalition agreements) or party politics on the strategic planning process is a limitation of this manuscript that needs to be acknowledged.

FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES BOTH CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL

From a **methodological perspective**, several interesting research avenues emerge based on this manuscript. First, it would be interesting to incorporate an element of time into empirical models through longitudinal datasets. Apart from going beyond associative findings, **longitudinal analysis** would allow us to identify how strategic planning effectiveness evolves over time – based on the experience curve of public organizations that use strategic planning. One might expect that planning team members with a creating

style, for instance, will become less interested in strategic planning once it loses its novelty or the impact of participation might become even stronger once public organizations learn how to effectively organize stakeholder participation.

Second, **lagged linear models** could also elucidate how strategic planning, in the long run, can contribute to organizational outcomes such as performance. Looking, for instance, at outcomes a year, two years, or even longer after the adoption of strategic planning would allow us to look at actual long term effects resulting from strategic planning.

Third, through the usage of **experimental methods** and theories derived from psychology and organizational behavior, future research could look further into the micro-processes of strategic planning and identify causal relations. In line with the indicated limitations of this manuscript, such a Behavioral Public Administration approach (Tummers et al. 2016) would be particularly useful to study the behavior of politicians within a strategic planning context.

Fourth, throughout this manuscript I have made a division between the individual and the organizational level. **Multilevel studies**, however, could bridge these two levels and examine how relations at the individual level are influenced by organizational-level variables (Hox 2010). Could it, for instance, be that politicians' reactions to performance information might be stronger in organizations with a professional planning department that produces regular performance reviews? Or that a creating cognitive style might have less of an impact if the organization has a lot of experience with strategic planning? Multilevel studies can help address such questions.

Finally, in order to better grasp how strategic planning results in positive outcomes for public organizations, **single or multi case studies** can be particularly useful. Such case studies can go where quantitative studies cannot, by fully engraining within the richness of the context of an organization or a set of organizations and deriving conceptual frameworks or theories that can subsequently be tested on a larger scale. As the strategic planning literature is typically not known for its strong theory base (Wolf and Floyd 2013), such theory building qualitative studies could "make sense" of the causal linkages underlying strategic planning

in public organizations - linkages that can then be tested to assess generalizability (Poister, Pitts, and Edwards 2010).

From a **conceptual perspective**, there are, again, several interesting research avenues. First, taking into account the limitation of this manuscript concerning political context, it would be interesting to identify how strategic planning processes interact with political documents and political decision-making. Conceptually, the **patterns of strategy formation** put forth by Mintzberg (1978) might be useful. Plans and coalition agreements could be considered “intended strategies”, whereas the political and managerial reality of the day could result in “emergent strategies”. A part of the “intended strategies” could be lost and become “unrealized strategy”, perhaps due to conflicts between political and managerial documents. And, ultimately, the realized strategy could become this mix of deliberately planned strategies as well as emergent strategies. How the political and administrative layer of the organization interact throughout this strategy formation pattern, could then be the focal point of study.

Second, it would be interesting to look at the importance of other process characteristics of strategic planning in public organizations, such as the flexibility or the capability of the strategic planning process. Typically, a **flexible strategic planning process** is assumed to generate benefits in dynamic and complex environments because it offers a framework for adaptation and strategic change (Barringer and Bluedorn 1999). Public-sector contexts might be identified in which a flexible strategic planning process is more adequate than a highly-formalized process. Additionally, capability-based authors argue that strategic planning is not just an exercise of making plans and devising targets, it is an **information-processing capability** of organizations (Ramanujam, Venkatraman, and Camillus 1986, Rogers, Miller, and Judge 1999). Focusing on the extent to which the strategic planning process actually collects and analyzes relevant information for decision-making could further our understanding of its value to public organizations.

Third, the planning team in itself also offers some interesting further research avenues. Whereas the manuscript focuses on the individual planning team members, it would be interesting to employ theories such as **Upper Echelon Theory** to define hypotheses concerning optimal planning team composition (Nielsen 2010). Is it, for instance, better to include a variety of cognitive styles within a planning team or is

a homogenous approach more appropriate? And what about the diversity concerning functional expertise and demographic characteristics within planning teams? Additionally, theories on **group processes** can also look at the importance of group interactions during strategic planning (Knight et al. 1999). For instance, how do conflict and trust within planning teams shape planning outcomes?

Fourth, whereas the manuscript at hand focuses on the decision-making impact of strategic planning in public organizations, other avenues concerning planning outcomes are possible. For instance, how does strategic planning contribute to **organizational learning** and **dynamic capability** in public organizations? From a resource-based view, these outcomes are related to the perspective that strategic planning is a capability of an organization (Ramanujam, Venkatraman, and Camillus 1986). Specifically, organizations can use strategic planning to learn about their environment, seize opportunities and adapt organizational processes and organizational skills accordingly (Teece 2007). Hence, strategic planning in itself becomes a capability that allows the organization to quickly adapt to and learn from a changing environment (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000). These outcomes might be particularly relevant in public organizations because concepts of “strategic capability and learning” in governments (i.e. the “strategic state”) are gaining importance with public management practitioners and academics (Joyce and Drumaux 2014).

8.4. Concluding remarks based on expert interviews

GOAL AND METHODS

In this final section of my conclusion, my goal is to identify some concluding remarks concerning my findings based on practitioner insights. This is not a separate paper, but rather a qualitative follow-up phase aimed at minimizing the gap “between those who conduct research and those who might implement research findings” (Charlier, Brown, and Rynes 2011, 222). Due to my focus on **Flemish municipalities** throughout my manuscript (see chapter four, six and seven), I am mainly interested in uncovering remarks from key stakeholders within this setting.

I identified five **key stakeholders** with whom to discuss my findings: The Flemish Government – Agency for Domestic Governance¹⁰, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities¹¹, the city of Ghent, the municipality of Wachtebeke, and a consultancy firm that services a variety of Flemish local governments on, among others, planning-related topics, namely IDEA Consult. These five stakeholder groups represent **different interests**, and as such offer the perfect opportunity to test the policy relevance of my research findings. Onsite interviews were conducted throughout the months of May and June 2016. The interviewees were the individuals within the organization best informed on the specific strategic planning context within Flemish municipalities.

The interviews were set up as follows: First, I offered an overview of my doctoral manuscript and my subsequent research findings. Second, I asked the interviewees to indicate how they perceived these findings and whether I missed out on some important elements. Third, I asked some direct questions to the interviewees and asked them to reply to specific quotes with the aim of identifying interesting conclusions for this manuscript.

Three themes emerged in the interviews and issues raised within the themes were surprisingly similar. The first theme focuses on the role of **politics in strategic planning**, the second theme looks at the importance of **flexibility and participation** and the third theme centers on the optimal **planning team composition**. Within each theme, I present a set of statements based on the interviews, which are meant to evoke debate and reflection. Importantly, the statements indicated below are my interpretations of the expert interviews and any mistakes or misinterpretations are, entirely, my responsibility.

THEME 1: THE ROLE OF POLITICS IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Rational planning practices such as strategic planning in general **do not seem to speak the same language** as politicians. Information derived from these practices is abstract, hard to understand and seems to contradict the typical “political way of doing things”.

¹⁰ The Dutch name is “het Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur”.

¹¹ The Dutch name is “de Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten”.

- Administrative staff has to play an important **interpreting role**. They are the ones who can translate information derived from rational planning practices into comprehensible data for politicians. Of course, the characteristics of administrative leaders within the municipality (e.g. their political “fingerspitzengefühl” and proactivity) is a critical element in all of this.
- Coalition agreements and other **political governance documents** strongly shape the content of the municipal strategic plan. This does not, however, imply that strategic plans are literal translations of these political documents. The definition of the content of the plan (e.g. policy goals) was typically a **collaborative effort** between political and administrative leaders where political documents were indeed crucial input, but so were environmental analyses and other information prepared by administrative staff.
- The importance of coalition agreements and other political governance documents in shaping the plan seems to be contingent upon the **characteristics of the political leaders**. New coalitions and/or a new mayors, for instance, are important factors that strengthen the importance of such documents and their subsequent translation into strategic plans.
- Simply disregarding coalition agreements and other political governance documents when drafting municipal strategic plans is considered undesirable. Specifically, the more the strategic plan takes into account such political documents, the more likely it is that politicians actually use the plan in practice. Hence, the key is to find a **balance** between incorporating political documents while simultaneously injecting some managerial logic in the plan.

THEME 2: TOWARDS FLEXIBLE AND PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIC PLANNING

- One of the reasons why strategic plans are not “top-of-mind” with politicians, is the assumption that these plans offer a **static, cross-sectional overview** and do not take into account the dynamic nature of municipal policymaking. Politicians thus seem to have a predisposition towards plans as inflexible and static documents. This inflexibility is also assumed by local politicians within the process itself, where they believe that a top-down, structured planning process is imposed upon them by the Flemish Government. In reality, however, the Flemish Government left ample

flexibility concerning “how” the planning process should be executed and encouraged a **bottom-up** approach.

- These assumptions conflict with the requirements of the Flemish Government, which do take into account several possibilities for making updates and changes to the municipal strategic plan. It is thus important to **educate local politicians** on the flexible nature of their municipal strategic plan in order for the plan to become a “working and lively document”.
- Additionally, the success of such flexibility is contingent upon how **responsive** the municipality is towards its environment. Are there, for instance, monitoring and evaluation systems present that periodically report on key information in the environment, thus monitoring patterns and trends that require actions?
- Flexibility also implies the freedom to adapt strategic planning processes based on the municipal contingencies. Although the nature and structure of the output (i.e. the formal reports) is mandated by legislation, there is ample flexibility on “how” this output is produced. As such, while still meeting the requirements put forth by the Flemish Government, municipalities can inject **an internal logic** into their strategic planning process – as opposed to simply copy-pasting planning processes from neighboring municipalities.
- The fact that participation during strategic planning is an important success factor seems logical but is nevertheless quite valuable. Specifically, several municipalities fully outsourced stakeholder and environmental analyses to **external consultants** while choosing to focus mainly on the financial aspects of the planning process themselves. The underlying rationale is that municipalities can be **penalized** on these financial aspects, but not on having underdeveloped stakeholder and environmental analyses.
- In order to ensure that municipalities do indeed execute thorough stakeholder and environmental analyses, there is a necessity for training sessions and other education initiatives on how to conduct such analyses and organize stakeholder participation. An interesting first step could be to captivate and widely publish some **best practices** from within the Flemish local government setting.

- The importance of stakeholder participation is also elucidated by the necessity for client centric policies and strategies, which take into account the **actual service users** of the municipality. Such policies can only be formulated by talking with frontline staff, the people who are in contact with service users in “the field”.
- Widespread stakeholder participation (both internally and externally) also illustrates that the municipal strategic planning process is broadly supported throughout the organization and is not just a top-down process solely executed by the financial manager. A synonym of municipal strategic planning is, after all, **citywide strategic planning** – not city-narrow strategic planning.

THEME 3: OPTIMAL PLANNING TEAM COMPOSITION

- Predominantly, the person responsible for the strategic planning process in Flemish municipalities seems to be either the **financial manager or accountant** of the municipality. Taking into account that the financial aspects of the planning cycle are the aspects that will be monitored and penalized by the Flemish Government, this finding is not that surprising.
- Financial managers or accountants might tend to lean more towards a **knowing or planning** cognitive style, indicating their preference for numbers and analysis and/or time management and well-organized activities. Based on chapter seven, however, these profiles were not necessarily identified as the **change champions** who can sell the planning process as well as the strategic plan throughout the municipality.
- In order for the strategic planning process to truly become a citywide process, it is important to have **creators within the planning team** who can “sell” the process throughout the organization. Indeed, such creators will be more open to dealing with the required changes and can help to convince the knowers and planners within the municipality to go along with the innovation.
- The involvement of creators as “**change champions**” becomes particularly relevant taking into account the limited guidelines on how municipalities can manage the required changes. Again, training and education activities are – due to popular demand – predominantly centered on the financial aspects of the planning cycle whereas the sessions on change management are far less popular and frequent. Nevertheless, first and foremost, strategic planning is an important

administrative change for Flemish municipalities. Such a change might not go over well if there is no one “selling” it within the organization.

FINAL CONCLUSION

Although the expert interviews indicate that strategic planning in Flemish municipalities is shaped by complex interactions between administrators, politicians, processes, instruments and political documents, an important consensus on the benefits of rational planning practices such as strategic planning did emerge during the interviews. Said consensus supports the empirical findings put forth by my manuscript and indicates that, although several pitfalls remain, **rational planning practices can indeed inject some managerial logic** into political decision-making processes.

Specifically, one of the main realized benefits of rational planning practices in Flemish municipalities is the fact that these practices offer administrators **a form of legitimacy** to inject evidence into political decision-making. The frameworks put forth by rational planning practices (e.g. strategic plans, strategic goals, performance measures,...) are indeed useful instruments to counterweight purely intuitive or political motives by forcing politicians to, at least to some extent, align their ideas with these frameworks. This benefit of rational planning practices becomes particularly potent when accompanied by **strong administrative leaders**. Simultaneously, the interviews indicate that this benefit is also one of the **main criticisms** towards rational planning practices from Flemish local politicians. Rational planning seems to shift a lot of the decision-making power within the municipality towards administrative staff. Hence, in order for rational planning’s benefits to fully emerge, we need to think about how to diminish the “**great divide**” between local politics and administration.

Nevertheless, the literature reviews, empirical studies and interviews incorporated into this manuscript illustrate that rational planning practices can indeed contribute to strategic decision-making in public organizations. This contribution, however, is at least partially contingent upon **(a)** the manner in which these practices are used during decision-making (e.g. blame avoidance), **(b)** the characteristics of the organizations that employs these practices (e.g. planning expertise), **(c)** the participatory nature of the planning process (e.g. involvement of external stakeholders), and **(d)** the cognitive style of planning team

members and their perceived usefulness of the planning process (e.g. involvement of creators as change champions).

8.5. References

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